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BETWEEN ECSTASY AND TRUTH

INTERPRETATIONS OF GREEK POETICS
FROM HOMER TO LONGINUS



STEPHEN HALLIWELL

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Homer to Longinus*

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Preface

What is poetry for? What difference can it make to the lives of those who hear or read it? Are its effects confined principally to the duration of the experience itself, forming special moments of resistance to the flow of quotidian life, moments in which hearers or readers are moved to intense states of absorption and enthrallment? Was Auden, whose views on poetry were demonstrably coloured in part by his familiarity with ancient Greek ideas, right to say (but in a *poem*) that 'poetry makes nothing happen' but is only 'A way of happening' (though one which 'survives' for perpetual re-enactment)?¹ Or can poetry's impact go further than that? Can it leave a lasting mark on people's beliefs, attitudes, and emotional dispositions, helping to change their lives rather than simply afford them a temporary means of psychological escape? And if poetry can command a more far-reaching influence of this kind, is that necessarily and always a positive thing (a sort of beneficial enlightenment) or might it sometimes be harmful, perhaps inducing false, sentimental, or unrealistic convictions which make the demands of life as a whole harder not easier to come to terms with? Can poetry tell or show us the truth? Then again, should we *want* it to—or was Nietzsche right that 'the reason we have art is so as not to be destroyed by truth' ('wir haben die Kunst, damit wir nicht an der Wahrheit zu Grunde gehn')?²

Such questions (extendable to literature and art in general) were first posed, in the Western tradition, by ancient Greeks. They are still, even now, of cultural interest and importance, and they continue to elicit divided responses from critics, theorists, and individual readers. By studying how Greeks formulated and attempted to answer these questions we can hope to reach a better, richer understanding of the problems of poetics they broach. This book is not a monograph which systematically investigates a tightly circumscribed domain. It is a thematically linked set of essays which offer fresh, incisive readings of a series of major texts in the evolution of Greek poetics. My main

¹ 'In Memory of W. B. Yeats', part II: Auden (1991: 248).

² Nietzsche (1988: xiii 500), notebook entry of 1888; the first four words in Nietzsche's German are given emphasis.

aim is to explore how the texts in question conceive of poetic value, the value(s) of poetry as located and realized in the experience of its audiences. (Most Greeks, if they had heard of it, would not have believed in ‘the affective fallacy’, any more than we should.) My project does not amount—and not only because of its selectiveness—to a history of Greek poetics or ‘literary criticism’; in certain respects, it may emphasize why constructing such a history is so difficult. What emerges from my readings is not a narrative of clear-cut positions following one another in progressive sequence, but more like a series of circling though gradually shifting debates about fundamental issues—issues, furthermore, which can be traced both inside and outside poetry: hence the inclusion of some poetic texts themselves in the enquiry.

At the heart of my enterprise is a recurrent dialectic of Greek ideas between, on the one hand, a concern with poetry as a powerfully transformative agency which carries hearers or readers outside themselves (the root meaning of ‘ecstasy’) and ‘draws out their souls’ (the root meaning of another pertinent Greek term, *psuchagôgia*), and, on the other hand, a tendency to judge poetry as a medium of truths ‘to live by’, a means of expressing thoughts and feelings which can help shape its audiences’ views of the world. There are many variations in ancient treatments of this contrast of values, a contrast whose implications make a radical difference, moreover, to suppositions about what it means (or whether it is even possible) to interpret and evaluate poetry. The resulting dialectic runs through the core of Greek poetics. It also forms a vital part of the longer-term trajectory of theories of poetry and literature.

In pursuing my own priorities, I have made a point of citing a wide range of modern scholarship in several languages, including much material which has appeared in just the last few years. Even when I disagree with those whose work I cite, I think it appropriate to acknowledge the existence of a strong culture of international scholarship in this area and to give readers information with which to consider alternatives to my own sometimes heterodox arguments. Those arguments are presented at times with deliberately vigorous advocacy. Productive academic debate calls for reasoning that is passionate as well as carefully weighed.

Earlier drafts of several chapters were presented as invited papers at various institutions. This fact is no incidental detail: without the charge of energy generated by receiving and fulfilling these invitations

the book might never have been written. The Gerald Else Lecture in the Humanities at the University of Michigan (October 2007) prompted the first version of parts of Chapter 2; further work on this chapter was undertaken for an international conference, 'Pathos: the Poetics of the Emotions', in Rio de Janeiro (October 2008), and for papers at McMaster University (November 2009, during my tenure as H. L. Hooker Distinguished Visiting Professor) and to the Classical Association of Scotland (Glasgow, June 2010). Chapter 3 was first written for the European College of Liberal Arts in Berlin (December 2005); later versions were presented at the Centre for the Ancient Mediterranean, Columbia University (April 2007), to the Classics Department of Toronto University (November 2009), and at the conference 'Comic Interactions' at University College London (July 2009). An early sketch of some of the ideas in Chapter 4 was given at the Princeton Classical Philosophy Colloquium (December 2002) in reply to a paper by John Ferrari; an Italian version later became the 7th Carchia Memorial Lecture in Rome (March 2007), the second half of the chapter formed the S. V. Keeling Memorial Lecture at University College London (March 2009), and other drafts were presented as research seminars at Columbia and Durham universities (both April 2007) and as a lecture to the triennial conference of the Gesellschaft für antike Philosophie in Würzburg (September 2010). Part of Chapter 5 was written as a contribution to a conference on the *Poetics* at the Université catholique de Louvain (November 2002). An Italian version of Chapter 7 was read at a conference on the sublime at the Istituto Svizzero in Rome (September 2006). For their interest in my work and for their generous hospitality I am sincerely indebted to my hosts on all those occasions: Paolo D'Angelo, Pierre Destrée, Michael Erler, Helene Foley, William Harris, Elisabetta Matelli, Daniel McLean, Thomas Norgaard, Fernando Santoro, Ruth Scodel, Bob Sharples (to whose memory I pay tribute), Victoria Wohl, and Nancy Worman.

Among those who have commented on drafts, or otherwise reacted to my ideas, I would like to single out Myles Burnyeat (for a series of exchanges about Plato), Richard Rutherford (for using his subtle understanding of Homeric poetry to help me improve Chapter 2), Ralph Rosen (for several probing discussions of *Frogs*), Glenn Most and Robert Doran (for separately helping me to sharpen my thoughts on Longinus), and Malcolm Heath (for the stimulus of his disagreement about so many things). I am grateful, finally, to the Arts and

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I dedicate this book with sadness to the memory of Sir Kenneth Dover, who died in March 2010 when I was at an advanced stage of revising my typescript. In addition to having benefited, like so many other Hellenists, from his exemplary scholarship, I am fortunate to have been able to count him as the most important of my teachers and, in later years, a dear friend. I was greatly influenced by his commitment to both intellectual and imaginative openness in interpreting the phenomena of Greek culture: I only wish the present work were a worthier way of recording my appreciation of what I owe him.

SH

St Andrews

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Note to the Reader

Abbreviations of the names of ancient authors and the titles of their works generally conform to the conventions of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3rd edn. revised, ed. S. Hornblower and A. Spawforth (Oxford, 2003). Occasional divergences (such as English titles for the plays of Aristophanes) should be self-evident.

Abbreviations for standard reference works, collections of fragments, etc., mostly follow the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*. Note, however, the following:

CA	<i>Collectanea Alexandrina</i> , ed. J. U. Powell (Oxford, 1925)
CHO	A. Heubeck <i>et al.</i> , <i>A Commentary on Homer's Odyssey</i> , Eng. tr., 3 vols. (Oxford, 1988–92)
EGF	<i>Epicorum Graecorum Fragmenta</i> , ed. M. Davies (Göttingen, 1988)
G-P	<i>The Greek Anthology: Hellenistic Epigrams</i> , ed. A. S. F. Gow and D. L. Page, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1965)
IC	G. S. Kirk <i>et al.</i> , <i>The Iliad: A Commentary</i> , 6 vols. (Cambridge, 1985–93)
IEG	<i>Iambi et Elegi Graeci</i> , ed. M. L. West, 2nd edn., 2 vols. (Oxford, 1989–92)
LfgrE	<i>Lexikon des frühgriechischen Epos</i> , ed. H. J. Mette <i>et al.</i> (Göttingen, 1955–)
PGL	<i>A Patristic Greek Lexicon</i> , ed. G. W. H. Lampe (Oxford, 1971)
PLF	<i>Poetarum Lesbiorum Fragmenta</i> , ed. E. Lobel and D. Page (Oxford, 1955)
PMG	<i>Poetae Melici Graeci</i> , ed. D. L. Page (Oxford, 1962)
Σ	scholia
SSR	<i>Socratis et Socraticorum Reliquiae</i> , ed. G. Giannantoni, 4 vols (Naples, 1990)

Fragments of tragedy are cited from B. Snell *et al.* (eds.), *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta* (Göttingen, 1971–2004), those of comedy from R. Kassel and C. Austin (eds.), *Poetarum Graecorum Fragmenta* (Berlin, 1983–), in both cases usually without the abbreviated title of the edition.

In the Bibliography abbreviations of journal titles are those, wherever possible, of *L'Année philologique*. Note the following additions:

JAAC *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*

Mnem. *Mnemosyne*

TLS *Times Literary Supplement*

All dates, unless marked otherwise, are BC.

All translations from sources both ancient and modern are my own unless otherwise stated.

1

Setting the Scene: Questions of Poetic Value in Greek Culture

Trouvons nous pourtant quelque fin au besoin d'interpréter?

(Montaigne)

An artist's work cannot be interpreted.

(Tolstoy)¹

In a famous passage from the first book of the *Odyssey*, the epic poem turns the mirror of its own narrative, obliquely yet unmistakably, on itself—and at the same time, by implication, on its own audience, whoever and wherever it might be. Telemachus' conversation with 'Mentes', the disguised Athena, has just ended; the goddess has departed like a bird flying out of the hall, and Telemachus realizes that the person who has been encouraging him to believe that his father is still alive, as well as urging him to stand up to the overweening suitors, was no human after all. At this point, Telemachus, newly endowed by Athena with 'strength and courage', is reabsorbed, as it were, into the larger scene in the hall, where throughout the intimate conversation between Odysseus' son and the disguised goddess the bard Phemius has been singing to the suitors. The song had started at 1.155; only now, at 1.325 ff., do we, the *Odyssey*'s own audience, discover the subject of that song, 'the grievous return-journey which Pallas Athena had inflicted on the Achaeans after they left Troy'.²

¹ Montaigne, *Essays* iii. 13, 'On Experience': Montaigne 1962: 1068. Tolstoy, 'What is Art?', ch. 12: Tolstoy 1930: 194; cf. Ch. 4 n. 22.

² ὁ δ' Ἀχαιῶν νόστον ᾄειδε | λυγρόν, ὃν ἐκ Τροίης ἐπετείλατο Πάλλας Ἀθήνη: *Od.* 1.326–7. See West, *CHO* i. 116–17, de Jong 2001: 34–5, for the mythical reference and related points.

Phemius' song, while not identical to the *Odyssey* itself, is a mythological counterpart to it and a microcosm of the epic's complex relationship to its own audience(s).³ The ironic circumstance that the song is being performed at the very point where Athena is working to bring about the return of Odysseus and his triumph over the suitors is layered with significance in regard to the various audiences present within the scene. The suitors are the primary audience in the sense that they force Phemius to sing for them (see 1.154); in an exception to their general disorderliness, they listen to him in silence (1.325–6). In their case the dramatic irony is pointed: they are blind to the fact that, whatever the song may be narrating, their own doom still awaits them at Odysseus' hands and with Athena's direct help. Telemachus, who was initially pessimistic enough to tell his visitor that Odysseus' 'white bones' were either rotting in the rain or being swept along by the waves of the sea,⁴ is only in a position to become fully aware of Phemius' song when his private conversation has finished: in his case, the paradox is that the psychological strength he has received from that conversation has consequences for what he might make of the song, since his hopes have been boosted that Odysseus may yet return home and therefore avoid the fate of the other Greeks of whom Phemius sings. Finally, and most poignantly, there is Penelope, who hears the song from her chamber upstairs and is moved to such a pitch of distress that she descends into the hall and, in a flood of tears, interrupts the song (1.328–44).

If the suitors' interest in Phemius' song is visible only from the outside (in their unusually concentrated silence) and therefore represents, in part, an enigma to the *Odyssey*'s own audience, and if Telemachus moves from being initially detached from the song into a new relationship (concealed from those around him) to the emotional charge of its theme, in Penelope's case we can see her response as that of an active, troubled, but uncertain interpreter. We are told that on hearing the song being performed in the hall below she 'understood it' (or perhaps 'focused on it') 'in her mind' (*φρεσὶ σύνθετο θέσπιν ἀοιδῆν*, 1.328). It is clear, in one respect, why this should be so: since she does not know whether Odysseus is alive or not, it is possible that he himself is another of those destroyed on the 'grievous return-journey'

³ See my further discussion of the shifting positions of epic audiences in Ch. 2; on the present passage, cf. 44, 78, 80–1.

⁴ *Od.* 1.161–2; cf. the even more vivid imagination of Eumaeus at 14.133–6 (but with Ch. 2, 50–3, for his ambivalent and confused beliefs).

from Troy. If that were so, the song would be confronting Penelope with an unbearable truth. Some critics, both ancient and modern, have gone further, reading Phemius' song as actually *containing* the death of Odysseus and therefore amounting to a kind of inverted (or 'false') *Odyssey*. Whether or not that inference is found persuasive, Penelope's reaction is not simply an aberration; it attests to the song's emotional effect on a mind highly sensitive to its resonances. For Penelope, all (good) songs are, or should be, 'entrancements' (*θελεκτήρια*, 1.337), a term which implies intensity and fullness of psychological absorption in the world of the song.⁵ Such entrancement is a form of imaginative and emotional power. In Penelope's case, however, that power spills over, as it were, from the song into her life, reinforcing her grief and making the life itself harder to endure. But that is not the same as saying that she is not responding to the song itself.⁶

Penelope's request prompts an intervention from Telemachus (another 'interpreter' of song) rather than a reply from the singer Phemius. But her son makes a series of points which are not easy to harmonize into a stable conception of song. He tells her, first, that bards should be allowed to give pleasure in accordance with their own inclinations, an observation hardly calculated to soften his mother's grief; secondly, that it is not bards themselves but Zeus who is responsible for human suffering, the subject of the song; thirdly, that audiences are always drawn to the 'newest' song (even though Penelope implied that she has heard this same one before: 'this song which always oppresses my spirits', 1.340–1); and, finally, that Penelope should steel her heart and mind to listen to the song. Telemachus appears to accept that the song tells a fundamental truth about the world (that the will of Zeus determines everyone's destiny), though he does not attempt to explain why stories of human suffering and death should be a source of pleasure—a puzzle latent in the *Odyssey* itself from its prologue onwards. At the same time, he suggests that the truth in question is more a matter of the 'human condition' than of any individual life ('it isn't only Odysseus', he says, 'who lost his day of return at Troy', 1.354–5).⁷ That last remark, however, is our clue to

⁵ See Ch. 2, esp. 47–53.

⁶ For further discussion of Penelope's reaction, including its differences from the experience of Odysseus in book 8, see Ch. 2, 80–1.

⁷ See de Jong (2001: 37–8) for a trenchant interpretation of Telemachus' remarks (largely) in terms of his relationship with his mother. Lloyd (1987: 86) argues that in his own way Telemachus is consoling Penelope for her distress; that is hard to see.

an element of dissimulation on Telemachus' part. We have heard already of his own habits of grief for Odysseus (1.242–3) but we have also seen how Athena has given him both new hope and the basis of a strategy towards the suitors. Telemachus' mind is now on other things: he has cogent, pragmatic reasons not to express himself too explicitly on the theme of Phemius' song.

This wonderful scene from the *Odyssey*—as poetically artful as it is dramatically compelling—puts before us three different (potential) audiences of song, all of whom are restricted or partial in some way (just like ourselves) *vis-à-vis* Phemius' performance. The complexity of the divergent responses represented by the suitors, Penelope, and Telemachus does not yield a decodable message about the nature of poetry. Instead, it displays (and enacts) something of the power of song while simultaneously blocking a transparent understanding of that power: it thereby implicitly poses questions about the *Odyssey* itself and its own audiences. In this respect the scene is emblematic of the kinds of problems of poetics, as they can be called retrospectively at least, with which I shall be engaging throughout this book. It is a remarkable fact about ancient Greece's rich traditions of poetry (or, in the earliest terminology, 'song'⁸) that there developed alongside, and partly within, those traditions a domain of self-conscious poetics: a domain of reflection on, and debate about, the nature and functions of poetry. It is a symptom of some of the deepest commitments of Greek culture that a strong impulse to voice evaluative responses to poetry is manifest long before the phenomenon of formalized poetics

⁸ Contrary to a common claim (e.g. Ford 2002: 131: 'sudden appearance of this vocabulary'; cf. Lanata 1963: 229–30), Greek usage of ποιεῖν, ποιήσις, ποιητής etc. for 'poetry' probably developed (orally) well before its 5th cent. attestations: Solon 20.3 *IEG* (μεταποίησον) presupposes such usage; cf. e.g. Dover (1997: 185; reference misprinted), West (2007: 35), with Durante (1976: 170–3) for older Indo-European ideas of poetry as 'making'. The category of 'poetry' was overlaid on and included that of 'song': e.g. Pl. *Phdr.* 245a, Isoc. 10.64; for 'song' = 'poetry' even in a classical prose text, note Xen. *Cyr.* 2.2.13; Arist. *Poet.* 4.1448b23–4 speaks of *poiêsis* even in the realm of improvised oral performance. I do not understand what Ford (2002: 10) means by stating that archaic Greece's 'many forms of song . . . were not referred to as instances of a single art or activity . . . called "song"' (my emphasis): what else does the terminology of ἀοιδή, ἀοιδός etc. amount to if not designation of an activity called 'song'? Ford himself happily speaks of 'song', 'singing', and 'singers' in archaic Greece; cf. Ford (1992: 171), 'the older conception of poetry as singing'. For the likelihood that 'song' terminology is already traditional, partly non-literal, usage even in the earliest texts, see Nagy (1989: 4–8).

comes into view in the fifth and fourth centuries. The roots of poetics are entangled with the roots of poetry itself.

Despite many modifications and variations, some of the most fundamental issues generated by ancient Greek debates over poetry have long continued to influence and inform later traditions of poetics—partly via the reading of texts such as Aristotle’s *Poetics* and Longinus (I retain the traditional name) *On the Sublime* which acquired canonical status during certain periods; partly via more diffuse processes of conceptual translation and adaptation. In considering some of the questions which motivated Greek thinking about poetry, we are therefore retracing concerns which have had a shaping impact on the history of poetic criticism and theory, as well as on the wider disciplines of aesthetics and philosophy of art. This means that there is a double motivation for continuing to be interested in Greek poetics: first, the challenge of trying to make sense of ancient ideas within their own cultural settings;⁹ secondly, the fact that those ideas are part of the genealogy of arguments and attitudes in whose modern forms some of our own values may still be invested.¹⁰

The project pursued in this book is not a history of ancient Greek poetics but a series of linked explorations in some of the greatest texts and some of the hardest problems which *gave* Greek poetics a history. Although the topics addressed follow the promptings of the individual texts rather than a monothematic agenda of my own, the chapters of the book (summarized below) are nonetheless broadly organized around what I see as a recurrent dialectic between distinct, though not necessarily incompatible, paradigms of poetic value—paradigms designated here loosely, but I hope usefully, by the notions of ‘ecstasy’ and ‘truth’. This pair of terms serves as a sort of conceptual shorthand for competing views and priorities in the works to be studied, though their equivalents in Greek, together with other closely

⁹ Hunter (2009: 168) complains about ‘the modern tendency to treat “ancient literary criticism” as a discrete area of ancient writing, to be studied in isolation from the literature which the ancient critics discussed’. But he does not explain exactly what is wrong with treating criticism as a subject in its own right (with, NB, ‘its own history’, *ibid.* 8); nor does his own patchwork method of reading do more justice to the ideas of ancient critics: on this point, cf. the comments of Ford (2010: 705–6).

¹⁰ Halliwell (2002a) is one attempt to show how ancient ideas can continue to inform modern critical problems. Cf. Feeney (1995) for reflections on the complex relationship between modern and ancient critical priorities.

associated vocabulary (see below), do play an active role in much of the material under discussion.

Under the heading of ‘ecstasy’ I group those viewpoints in poetics which locate and seek value above all in states of intense psychological absorption and transformation (being ‘taken outside oneself’) as experienced in direct encounter with song or poetry. Ecstasy, for these purposes, is not straightforwardly or uniformly a feeling of bliss and exhilaration. Its scope includes exposure to powerful emotions, such as those of tragedy, whose essential content may have a dark, disturbing side. The conditions of poetic ecstasy can generally be thought of as those in which the mind is ‘turned aside’ from or made to ‘forget’ its ordinary existence, and for which the vocabulary of ‘entrancement’ or ‘bewitchment’ (θέλγειν, κηλεῖν), ‘stirring/drawing the soul’ (ψυχαγωγεῖν), ‘stunning impact’ (ἐκπληξίς), as well as ‘ecstasy’ itself (ἔκστασις), forms an important cluster of lexical markers in many of the texts discussed in this book.¹¹ The supreme valuation of such states—collectively describable as ‘psychagogic’,¹² in derivation from one of the Greek terms just listed—has a tendency, moreover, to regard poetic experience as psychologically complete in itself and therefore having no need of (perhaps even being inherently resistant to) discursive interpretation. One might draw here an illuminating modern parallel with the well-known essay ‘Against Interpretation’ by Susan Sontag, who forcefully opposes the procedures of interpretation, which she considers an impoverishing exercise of the critical intellect, to a conception of authentic experience of art as a matter of ‘pure, untranslatable, sensuous immediacy’.¹³

¹¹ ‘Turn aside’, see *παρέτραπε* at Hes. *Theog.* 103, with 16–7 below (where I translate as ‘alter’); cf. the force of the same prefix in *παραψυχάς* at Timocles fr. 6.4, with my text below. Pl. *Menex.* 235a–c gives a *parodic* account of ecstasy (in response to oratory) as temporary loss of self (NB the retrospective clue in *ἀναμνήσκομαι ἑμαυτοῦ*, 235c), thereby attesting the appeal of such ideas; cf. Ch. 7 n. 12. On the other Greek vocabulary in my text, see the Index of Greek Terms; cf. surveys in Pfister (1939, 1959). Compare ‘enchantment’ as the organizing theme of Walsh (1984), but my interpretations differ from his at almost every point. Recent usage of ‘ecstasy’ to denote aesthetic responses specifically to music can be found in Jourdain 1997: esp. 327–31, Kivy 2009: e.g. 99, 232, 259–60; much less favourable use in Kundera 1995: 84–90, 234–7. Experiences of poetry, music, and art are among the many triggers of ‘ecstasy’ documented in Laski (1961).

¹² See Ch. 5, 223–6, for the semantic evolution of the *ψυχαγωγεῖν* word-group from necromancy to the quasi-magical influence of (poetic) language on the mind.

¹³ Quotation from Sontag (1983: 100). Sontag’s defence of art as ‘magic’ (95, 101) harks back to archaic Greek precedents (cf. Ch. 2, 47–9, Ch. 6, 274). Ironically (given

In contrast to views which privilege ecstatic intensity, often assimilating it to the dynamics of erotic experience,¹⁴ I use the term ‘truth’ here to characterize the fundamental thrust of positions which emphasize (or, in some instances, *question*) poetry’s more lasting cognitive and/or ethical value for the beliefs and attitudes of its audiences—a value which depends on some kind of enlarged grasp of reality (whatever that is taken to be) and which can extend to the idea of poetry as sufficiently instructive to be something ‘to live by’.¹⁵ The scope of such a category of truth is wide; it can embrace any of the following (as well as the shifting interplay between them): narrative and representational accuracy; generalizing, even universal, fidelity (or ‘truth to’) various aspects of the world (including the less than fully accessible world of the gods); emotional or psychological realism; and ethically normative statements or injunctions (whose truth encodes what ‘should be’ rather than what merely is the case). Whereas ‘ecstatic’ models of poetic experience typically carry with them a resistance to (the need for) interpretation, truth-centred conceptions of poetic value appear intrinsically to place discursive and rational(izing) demands on interpreters, requiring those who discern truth in poetry to explain its presence and justify its credentials—or, equally, allowing those who deny poetry’s expression of truth to assert its absence. A clash between the specifically hermeneutic implications of such contrasting paradigms of poetic value is foregrounded as a locus of theoretical concern in its own right, but also (on my reading: see Chapter 4) framed as an unresolved conundrum, in Plato’s *Ion*, a work whose own subtleties have ironically

her view of Plato as the originator of artistic *theory*, 95–6) Sontag’s position displays a kind of reverse Platonism, contrasting ‘the luminousness of the thing in itself’ (103) to the ‘shadow world’ of meanings and ideas (99). Cf. also Ch. 4 n. 108. McGilchrist (1982) constructs a cognate opposition between art and criticism: ‘art exists precisely to transcend those patterns of thought which criticism imposes on it’ (65).

¹⁴ See Ch. 2, 46–7, Ch. 3, 101–3, Ch. 4, 194–9, Ch. 6, 280.

¹⁵ See Pl. *Resp.* 10.606e for the (contested) idea of living one’s life in accordance with Homer, *κατὰ τοῦτον* . . . ζῆν, with a possible echo of Xenophanes B10 DK, ‘from the start everyone has learnt according to Homer’, *ἐξ ἀρχῆς καθ’ Ὅμηρον ἐπεὶ μεμαθήκασι πάντες*, with Babut (1974: 116). Various formulations of the idea of poets as ‘guides to life’ occur at Pl. *Lysis* 213e–14a, *Leg.* 9.858c–e, *Isoc.* 2.3, 43. For one perspective on ideas of ‘truth’ in Greek poetics, see Puelma (1989). The history of ideas on literary ‘truth’ is richly sampled in Ruthven (1979: 164–80). Zuidervart (2009) offers a vigorous attempt to reinstate a concept of truth in a modern theory of aesthetics.

been obscured by a long history of interpretative overconfidence.¹⁶ What is looked for in the experience of poetry will always make a difference to what is expected of its interpreters.

The kind of contrast I have sketched between ecstasy and truth, a contrast for more than one reason not reducible to a bare dichotomy between pleasure and edification, appears in numerous versions across the whole historical span of Greek poetics. Used not as an all-explanatory key but as a guiding schema flexible enough to be modified for the preoccupations of particular texts and contexts, the contrast can throw light on patterns of thought which gave Greek arguments about poetry much of their cultural urgency and which help them retain much of their continuing vitality. As may already be apparent, my initial account of the organizing theme of the book points to models of value which have, so to speak, different centres of gravity but which, even so, *need* not come into direct conflict. If ecstasy and truth are logically independent of each other, might not the first nonetheless be in some way a vehicle of the second, and the second part of the content of the first? If the range of psychagogic experience for which 'ecstasy' is shorthand lifts audiences out of quotidian states of consciousness, must this always involve a kind of bewitching illusion or might it (sometimes) be a conduit for the attainment of insight or enlightenment? If truth (in whatever respect) is a prime desideratum of poetry, might it be the case that what produces a quintessentially *poetic* apprehension of truth is something which belongs to a special plane of imaginative and emotional concentration?

In a cameo illustration of this point (though one whose dramatic context and implications we cannot reconstruct), the speaker in a fragment from a comedy by the fourth-century playwright Timocles claims that the experience of tragic theatre provides a kind of temporary escape (a turning aside and consoling of the mind, *παραψυχάς*) into a realm where spectators can forget their own woes and become 'spellbound by the sufferings of others' (*πρὸς ἄλλοτριῶ τε ψυχαγωγηθεῖς πάθει*). Yet this experience, he explains, is one which allows the spectator to leave the theatre better 'educated' (*παιδευθεῖς*) about the nature of life and suffering. A lasting effect ('the tragedians

¹⁶ See my reading in Ch. 4, 166–79; note esp. 172–3 on Ion's split reaction to Socrates' account of inspired rapture in relation to his roles as performer and (critical) interpreter.

benefit us all') comes about through cognitive processes in which the mind gets closer to the truth of things: having 'comprehended' (*καταμανθάνειν*, stressed by repetition) the cases of individual tragic figures depicted on stage, the spectator ponders (*ἐννοεῖσθαι*) what he sees in the plays and takes back into his own life a better capacity to cope with misfortune.¹⁷ Sustained emotional absorption, it seems, can be the medium of truth-bearing shafts of insight. The price of this view, however, is a double paradox: being imaginatively transported into the lives of others takes one out of one's own existence yet somehow leaves one with an altered perception of one's own life; and that perception is accompanied by a reduced susceptibility to pessimistic emotions, even though what tragedy has shown its audience is, on this very account, how extreme human sufferings can be.

The condensed reasoning exhibited in this fragment may be coloured by comic exaggeration, but it nonetheless reflects habits (and puzzles) of thought and feeling which were embedded in the culture of classical Athenian theatre. In subsequent chapters of this book I shall examine texts whose critical values can be inspected in far greater detail, even if they do not always present themselves with the pithy directness of Timocles' speaker. On the broadest scale, it is my aim to argue that the conceptions of poetry elaborated by authors as different as Aristotle, Gorgias, and Longinus all work towards a synthesis of the types of values I am associating with the categories of 'ecstasy' and 'truth', while Aristophanes, Plato, Isocrates, and Philodemus (each in a distinctive mode of writing and with a distinctive agenda) recognized—and left—the relationship in question as an acute problem. And before them all came Homeric epic, which had made the nature of poetic value, as we have already glimpsed, a theme of profound resonance. But for all these authors and texts the issues at stake are the stuff of competing judgements: the history of Greek poetics, as of Greek poetry itself, is indelibly agonistic. In terms of the overall shape of my project, therefore, the word 'between' in the title of the book is not to be neglected. My readings will chart a dialectic of ideas, not a rigid antithesis or polarity, in Greek attitudes and sensibilities towards poetry.

¹⁷ Timocles fr. 6; cf. n. 11 above, with Ch. 5 n. 39, Ch. 6 n. 115. There is no compelling reason to follow Pohlenz (1965: ii. 462–3) in detecting the legacy of specifically Gorgianic ideas in this fragment.

Matters of poetic ‘truth’ acquire an extra layer of complexity when we start to reckon with the Greek notion of ‘likeness/resemblance to the truth’, an ancestor of the family of literary and aesthetic concepts which includes *vraisemblance*, illusionism, and realism in their multiple guises. In some contexts, such as Xenophanes’ recommendation that certain ideas (about the divine) should be ‘believed as being like the truth’ (ταῦτα δεδοξάσθω μὲν εἰκότα τοῖς ἐτύμοισι), this notion serves as a form of epistemological plausibility and thus a surrogate for, or approximation to, the value of the (otherwise imperfectly attainable) truth itself.¹⁸ In other contexts, such as the Hesiodic description (to be considered below) of certain kinds of song as ‘falsehoods that seem like true things’ (ψεῦδᾶ . . . ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα), a different rationale comes into play. As soon as one contemplates the thought of poetic materials which merit that categorization, and about whose status there is therefore something more to be said than that they are either true or false *tout court*, one thorny issue that has to be faced is whether, or how far, Greek culture can be said to have possessed anything like a concept of ‘fiction’.

Views on this subject are widely at variance. Modern scholars can be found who locate an awareness, even the ‘invention’, of fiction (as practice and/or idea) in such diverse places as Homeric epic (especially the *Odyssey*), Hesiod’s account of the Muses, the archaic growth of literacy (and its impact on ideas about different functions of communication), Pindaric *aperçus* on poetry, Gorgias’ theory of language, Plato’s dialogues, Attic comedy (Old or New), Aristotle’s *Poetics*, Theocritean bucolic, and the Greek novel.¹⁹ This is not the place for a dissection of each of the claims just indicated, which

¹⁸ Xenophanes B35 DK, with Leshner (1992: 165, 169–76). Cf. n. 40 below.

¹⁹ Homer: e.g. Bowie (1993: 9–20); specifically on the *Odyssey*, Richardson, *IC* vi. 26, Collobert (2004), Hunter (2008: ii. 854–6, 861). Hesiod: see n. 31 below. Literacy: Rösler (1980). Pindar: Richardson 1985: 385–6 (NB ‘the art of fiction’). Gorgias: Finkelberg (1998: 177). Plato’s dialogues: e.g. Hunter 2008: ii. 850–4, cf. Morgan (2003), Gill (1979) specifically on the Atlantis myth, and note Nietzsche’s idea of Plato as inventor of the novel (*Birth of Tragedy*, 14: Ch. 4 n. 8). Old Comedy: Lowe 2000*b*, cf. Lowe 2000*a*: 88, 158, 186 (but NB qualifications on 85). New Comedy: Konstan 1998: 9–10. Aristotle’s *Poetics*: e.g. Nightingale 2006: 40, Janko 2011: 233. Theocritus: Payne 2007: esp. 1–15, but drawing a problematic distinction between ‘mimetic’ and ‘fully fictional’ fictions (cf. n. 23 below). Greek novel: Konstan (1998). Gill and Wiseman (1993) remains a stimulating collection on the problem of defining ancient conceptions of fiction; cf. Laird (2007: 285–98). See Momigliano (1993: 46–57) on the place of fiction in Greek ‘biography’, including Socratic dialogues as a genre; cf. Kahn 1996: 32–5.

evidently depend on something less than unanimity about the criteria of fictionality. My own position, in brief, is that what might count as fictionality within the Greek cultural framework is a historically as well as conceptually intricate question which does not lend itself to resolution in terms of determinate origins, let alone an act of primal 'invention'.²⁰ On the level of verbal classification, it is true that one-to-one matching of any single lexical item in Greek criticism with a concept of fiction is unsustainable. But that does not mean that there is no Greek terminology which overlaps with English uses of 'fiction', a word with its own less than entirely stable history of semantics (not to mention the further complications which would enter the picture if we considered the vocabulary of 'fiction' in other modern languages). 'Falsehoods that seem like true things' may indeed be a case in point of such terminology (see below), and there are other candidates too, not least the word-group which includes *πλάττειν* (to fashion, mould), *πλάσμα* (fabrication), etc.²¹ We have good reason, moreover, to suppose that fiction amounts not to a sharp-edged category but a blurred spectrum of communicative modes and practices. If so, we may expect its forms to be recognized, and its implications signalled, with varying degrees of self-consciousness and conceptual explicitness.²²

The basic possibility of fiction is inherent in the operations of human imagination, language, and narrative. It consists, roughly, in thought or discourse whose contents do not lay claim to literal truth (even though such claims may be ostensibly made *inside* fiction) yet

²⁰ Halliwell (2012*b*) offers fuller treatment of the issues. For considerations which treat fiction as a broader category of discourse and/or thought, see Trimpi (1971) with Vaihinger (1924: 135–43), Eden (1986); cf. Kermode (2000: 36–43).

²¹ For *πλάττειν* and congeners, see e.g. Xenophanes 1.22 *IEG*, Pl. *Resp.* 2.377b, Eratosthenes *apud* Strabo 1.2.3, Asclepiades of Myrlea *apud* Sext. *Emp. Math.* 1.252 (cf. Ch. 5 n. 18). Other vocabulary relevant to Greek awareness of fictionality includes *ποιεῖν* ('make', 'invent': e.g. Arist. *Poet.* 9.1451b20–30, with Ch. 5, 233; cf. Ch. 6 n. 69), *ἀπάτη* (aesthetic 'deception', with Ch. 6, 275–7), *μῦθος* (qua partly fabricated narrative, e.g. Pl. *Phdo* 60c, *Tim.* 22c–d; cf. n. 44 below, Ch. 6, 293–4, Rispoli 1988: 29–56, Brisson 1998: 40–8), *μίμησις* (mimesis as world-simulation: Halliwell 2002*a*: index s.v. fiction), and even *ψεудής* ('false' as inclusive of fictional: e.g. Pl. *Resp.* 2.376e–7a; cf. n. 40 below).

²² For philosophical recognition that fiction allows of degrees, and/or mixture with 'non-fiction', see e.g. Walton 1990: 71–2, Iser 1993: 1–4; on the applicability of this point to archaic Greece, cf. Pratt 1993: esp. 37–42. Gill (1993: 69–73) emphasizes that fictionality can be more or less explicit/determinate as a cultural category, but he uses too narrow a conception in order to deny a sense of poetic fiction to Greek culture before Plato.

are also distinguishable from mendacity (which requires a speaker's deliberate intent to mislead). Fiction comes into being, if this is right, in a zone between the divisions of the seemingly strict dichotomy of truth and falsehood. Since truth and falsehood are themselves problematic both in theory and, sometimes, in practice, the space between them is itself likely to be irregular and imprecise around the edges. There is, accordingly, no watertight definition of what can or should count as fiction. (Nor, by the same token, can fiction ever be pure or absolute, without any element of conformity to an audience's beliefs about reality: if it could, it would be utterly unintelligible.²³) But this is the reverse of good grounds for construing the concept so narrowly as to deny any place for a sense of fictionality in the mentalities of whole cultural epochs.²⁴

The extent to which we can or should appeal to an idea of fiction to interpret some of the concerns of Greek poetics is a matter for contextually nuanced interpretation. At several points in this book I shall suggest that a sensitivity to the workings of fiction can be discerned in the texts under discussion. The evidence for this may be intermittent and fitful but is nonetheless significant for that; it involves connections with a number of important topics, among them questions of imagination, myth, representation, and arguably, in at least one case, the status of poetic speech acts.²⁵ For reasons already adumbrated, however, Greek consciousness of fictionality typically manifests itself against a larger background of attitudes to the presence or absence, the desirability or irrelevance, of 'truth' in poetry. As a preliminary exercise in probing some of the complexities which lurk in those attitudes, including traces of a sense of fictionality, I want now to consider a pair of prominent yet very different case studies, first from the archaic poet Hesiod and then from the rationalist historian Thucydides.

²³ Payne (2007: 3) ascribes the status of 'pure, or absolute, fiction' to Theocritus' *Idylls*; his reasons are inadequate. When he claims that Aristotle's *Poetics* does not broach the question of 'degrees of fictionality', he overlooks *Poet.* 25.1460b9–11: see Ch. 5, 210–16. On the impossibility of pure fiction, note Miner (1990: 30, with some non-Western examples); cf. Shaftesbury (1999: 5): 'truth is the most powerful thing in the world, since even fiction itself must be governed by it'.

²⁴ At the opposite end of the spectrum, I would make a corresponding case against the overstatement of Ligota (1982: 3), that 'the notion of historical reality' was 'foreign to the historical thinking of Graeco-Roman antiquity'.

²⁵ See the General Index s.v. 'fiction' for various references.

The relationship of poetry to truth is already marked as a problem in the song culture reflected in our earliest poets, Homer (the subject of my next chapter) and Hesiod. In a much discussed, perplexing passage of the *Theogony* Hesiod describes how the Muses who taught him (a capacity for) ‘beautiful song’, καλήν . . . ἀοιδήν (22), hailed him on the slopes of Helicon in terms which teasingly combined abuse with an ambiguous announcement of their powers.

ποιμένες ἄγραυλοι, κάκ' ἐλέγχεα, γαστέρες οἶον,
ἴδμεν ψεύδεα πολλὰ λέγειν ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα,
ἴδμεν δ' εὖτ' ἐθέλωμεν ἀληθέα γηρύσασθαι. (*Theog.* 26–8)

You shepherds who sleep in fields, lowest of the low, mere bellies,
We know how to tell many falsehoods that seem like true things,
And we know, when we wish, how to utter the truth.

It is naive to treat this as documentary autobiography. The whole passage is an artfully symbolic pronouncement of Hesiod's credentials and powers as singer: a poetic dramatization (Hesiod's) of a speech act (the Muses') which in turn expresses something about poetry itself (Hesiod's and others').²⁶ The circle of self-reference is an enticing riddle. What's more, the account of Hesiod's calling by the Muses (with the bestowal of a laurel staff, the ‘breathing’ into him of song, and the instruction to sing of the Muses themselves) is followed by an enigmatic proverbial question (‘but why all this time spent amid trees and rocks?’) which may well signal a wry deflation of the overtly visionary terms in which Hesiod has couched his claims.²⁷

But what do the Muses' words intimate? In the first place, surely, that the realm of ‘beautiful song/singing’ is quite distinct from the existence of ‘shepherds’ who care for their bellies alone: the scornful vocative in line 26, pluralized in order to generalize the implications

²⁶ West (1966: 158–63) provides extensive commentary, with poetic parallels and references to older scholarship; cf. West 1997: 286–8. For a selection of other readings of this prolifically discussed passage, see Lanata 1963: 22–7, Maehler 1963: 36–45, Stroh 1976, Kannicht 1980: 13–16, Walsh 1984: 22–36, Heath 1985: 258–60, Belfiore 1985, Havelock 1993: 98–105, Pratt 1993: 106–13, Clay 2003: 57–64, Ledbetter 2003: 42–8, Stoddard 2005, Arrighetti 2006: 3–25, Tsagalis 2009: 132–5. The attempt of Heiden (2007) to translate ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα as ‘equivalent to truth’ is misconceived; cf. Nagy (2010), who however unconvincingly separates the falsehoods in l. 27 from their real-seeming appearances (163). Most (2006: pp. xii–xvi) presses an autobiographical reading of *Theog.* 22–34 as a whole.

²⁷ ἀλλὰ τί μοι ταῦτα περὶ δρῶν ἢ περὶ πέτρων; Hes. *Theog.* 35. See West (1966: 167–9), esp. his conclusions on 169.

for human life (almost as though the Muses were talking over Hesiod's head to a larger audience), is delivered in the mocking tone of goddesses who have something superior to offer—a means, by implication, of elevating and transforming Hesiod's life through song. How song might possess such potential becomes complicated by the notorious duality in lines 27–8. Here modern interpretations multiply and clash. It is hard, though, to escape the implication that the Muses take full responsibility for *both* kinds of material, 'falsehoods that seem like true things' and 'the truth' itself (whatever that is taken to be). The key point is that if the Muses 'tell' both of these, then song itself can legitimately find a place for them both: we have no grounds, either here or elsewhere, to think of the Muses as actively causing *defective* song, even if, in extreme cases, they may be represented as blighting a singer's capacities.²⁸

Theogony 27–8 entails, then, that truth and falsehood can both be present in genuine (Muse-inspired) song or poetry. In fact, the force of 'many falsehoods' has the appearance of an acknowledgement that truth is far from being a prerequisite of song in general: the same point is visible in the later apophthegm, associated with Solon (and perhaps a deliberate echo of the *Theogony*), that 'bards utter many falsehoods' (πολλὰ ψεύδονται ἀοιδοί).²⁹ Moreover, it is entirely compatible with the words attributed to Hesiod's Muses that truth and falsehood might be combined even in the same song: we are not obliged to think of two separate kinds of poet, nor of a systematic difference of genre. It is pertinent that in the similar phrasing at *Odyssey* 19.203, where the narrator states that 'Odysseus, while speaking many falsehoods, made them seem like true things' (ἔσκε ψεύδεα πολλὰ λέγων ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα), the reference is to a speech in which the hero has indeed identifiably (for Homer's audience) mixed together truth and falsehood.³⁰ But if the Homeric line denotes a cunning form of duplicity, the sense of the Muses' words must be more subtle. Contrary to an often automatic assumption on the part of scholars, the Muses cannot be describing literally lying to poets,

²⁸ See the case of Thamyras at Hom. *Il.* 2. 594–600.

²⁹ See Solon 29 *IEG* for the sources. Cf. Σ on [Pl.] *Just.* 374a (=Philoch. *FGrH* 328 F1) for an interpretation which makes the adage treat truth in poetry as secondary to emotional enthrallment, ψυχαγωγία.

³⁰ On the mixture of elements in Odysseus' speech to Penelope see de Jong (2001: 468–9). Other variants of 'falsehoods that seem like true things' include Thgn. 713, *Dissoi Logoi* 3.10 (cf. Ch. 6 n. 22).

since poets are not the *audience* of communication from the Muses in the way in which Penelope hears (the disguised) Odysseus' speech. Hesiod's Muses are cryptically describing the status of various kinds of song or poetry—a status different from that of truth yet nonetheless espoused by the Muses. We have here a formulation which seems to meet the basic criteria for a sense of fiction which I mentioned earlier.³¹

To maintain that interpretation, it is crucial to distinguish, as many fail to do, between the Muses' *dramatic* tone (a teasing mockery which, if it were a pragmatic speech act, would be like saying 'you can't tell when we're lying and when we're telling the truth') and the *symbolic* import of their words, namely that song itself stands in a shifting relationship to truth and reality, and has a psychologically valid use for imaginatively convincing 'falsehoods'. This distinction changes the meaning of 'falsehood' (*ψεύδος*) itself. What would be undesirable in the service of sheer mendacity is to be understood as something functionally valuable within the dynamics of song, a means by which it draws its audiences into a world that resembles, but is not the same as, actuality (the realm of 'true things'): a sort of parallel world, by implication, in its capacity to interest, engage, and persuade.³² The consequence of a failure to make a distinction between the 'surface' and the 'message' of the Muses' speech is to make the goddesses impenetrably capricious—in which case nothing whatsoever can be inferred about their meaning. The force of the Muses' words is not, even so, something which logic alone can unlock: to grasp their point calls for an intuition of some of the things experience of poetry can offer the mind. Treated in this spirit, the teasing air of their pronouncement becomes a veiled yet intelligible statement about the psychological power of poetry.

³¹ West (1966: 162) glosses *ψεύδεα... ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα* as 'plausible fiction', Richardson, *IC* vi. 26 as 'credible fiction'; others prepared to invoke 'fiction' in this connection include Havelock (1993: 105), Heath (1985: 258–9), Puelma (1989: 75 n. 15), Bowie (1993: 21–2), Pratt (1993: 111–12), Levet (2008: 16). Contrast Ledbetter 2003: 46, Brillante 2009: 187–91.

³² Ledbetter (2003: 46), after apt criticism of some readings of the passage, errs by treating the Muses as primarily engaging in a 'threat of deception'; Granger (2007: 409) speaks of lying and mendacity, Finkelberg (1998: 177) intrudes the pejorative idea of 'a misrepresentation... a distortion of the truth'. Even Feeney (1991: 13) obscures the point by paraphrasing in terms of 'true song or *misleading* song' (my emphasis).

Theogony 27–8 acknowledges the existence and legitimacy of different kinds of poetic utterances, declaring many of them dependent on a seductively imagined surrogate for known reality. But we need also to bring this point into relation with other passages in the poem which convey ideas of the functions and values of song. One of these passages forms the penultimate phase of Hesiod's prologue of praise to the Muses:

ὁ δ' ὀλβιος, ὅντινα Μοῦσαι
 φίλωνται· γλυκερή οἱ ἀπὸ στόματος ῥέει αὐδὴ.
 εἰ γάρ τις καὶ πένθος ἔχων νεοκηδέϊ θυμῷ
 ἄζηται κραδίην ἀκαχήμενος, αὐτὰρ ἀοιδὸς
 Μουσάων θεράπων κλεῖα προτέρων ἀνθρώπων
 ὑμνήσει μάκαράς τε θεοὺς οἳ Ὀλυμπον ἔχουσιν,
 αἰψ' ὃ γε δυσφροσυνέων ἐπιλήθεται οὐδέ τι κηδέων
 μέμνηται· ταχέως δὲ παρέτραπε δῶρα θεάων. (*Theog.* 96–103)

Happy is he whom the Muses
 love: sweet is the voice which flows from his mouth.
 Even if a person carries grief in a mind laden with fresh sorrow
 and is withered at heart from distress, should a singer
 who serves the Muses celebrate the renown of former generations 100
 and the blessed gods who occupy Olympus,
 that person at once forgets his anguish, forgets
 his sorrows: so quickly do the goddesses' gifts alter the mind.

This passage, which fills out Hesiod's earlier remark that Memory bore the Muses to Zeus to be (by implication, for mortals) 'a means to forget suffering and a respite from anxieties' (*λησμοσύνην τε κακῶν ἄμπαυμά τε μερμηράων*, 55), is an eloquently idealized proclamation of the power of song to transform the minds of its hearers in the immediate process of poetic experience. This is underlined by the transition from the flow of the singer's sweet voice to the impact of the song on the audience: the sensual beauty of the performance (which we shall shortly see replicated in Hesiod's image of the Muses themselves) is the direct medium through which the value of song is transmitted. One needs to notice, furthermore, that this stress on audience psychology places no specific burden of *truth* on the contents of song; what is predicated of the hearer is a condition of imaginative-cum-emotional absorption, not of belief. Hesiod envisages a song repertoire which ranges across the worlds of humans and gods. With the former, the motif of 'renown' or famous deeds (*κλεῖα*)

marks a body of material which seeks to memorialize exceptional events from the past; this song function contains no intrinsic guarantee of (total) veracity, though it may, arguably, imply something more like a quest for ethical paradigms by which to judge human achievement and failure.³³ Nor do poetic celebrations of the gods necessarily purport to convey pure truth, especially when even Muse-inspired song, as we have seen, can be thought of as frequently consisting of convincing yet fictive utterances.

But even if a general presumption of truth *did* attach to song in either or both of the respects referred to at *Theogony* 100–1, the crucial point remains that Hesiod's claim of the mind-transporting effects of song does not depend on this. The transformative power of song at *Theogony* 98–103 involves a capacity to carry the mind outside itself (making it 'forget' its immediate circumstances and its own preoccupations) into other worlds—the distant human past and the divine society on Olympus—to which there is no alternative (and certainly no better) access than the vivid evocations of song itself. This, then, is a conception of poetic value which foregrounds its 'ecstatic' dimension. It is a conception partly reinforced by Hesiod's images of the Muses' own activities as the divine embodiment of song in its compound association with music and dance. Only 'partly', because the Muses themselves have no need of escape from anxiety or suffering; indeed, in Hesiod and other early Greek sources they are imagined as wholly immersed in a blissful existence of song.³⁴ There is therefore a gap between the divine archetype of song in its own right and the contingently circumscribed operations of song (as a 'gift' from the gods, *Theog.* 103) in the human world, at any rate since the Golden Age.³⁵ The Muses can be thought of as representing certain qualities of poetic experience in their 'purest' form, shorn of human constraints and limitations. Equally, those qualities become all the more poignantly, precariously valuable in the flawed conditions of human life.

³³ On the ambiguous status of renown, *kleos*, in the parallel vocabulary and the poetics of Homeric epic, see Ch. 2, 74–6. Explicit awareness of alternative versions even of *divine* myths is found as early (late 7th cent.?) as *Hom. Hymn* 1 A.2–7 West (2003a); cf. Pratt (1993: 24–30), with Griffith (1990: 196–200) on rival accounts of myths more generally.

³⁴ On the relationship of the Muses to experience of grief etc., cf. Ch. 2, 63–7, with n. 60 there for Hellenistic variations on this theme.

³⁵ Cf. the god-like life of feasting (with, implicitly, song) in the Golden Age, free from all misery and suffering, at Hes. *Op.* 111–15.

Hesiod's Muses are pictured as singers with resonantly beautiful voices (10, 39–43, 68–9) and as sensuous dancers with delicate feet (3) and soft complexions (5) whose performances manifest (quasi-)erotic loveliness (8, 70).³⁶ They are themselves totally carefree in spirit (61, in contrast to the human state at 55 and 98–103) and give intense pleasure even to the mind of Zeus himself (37, 51). All these details are idealized projections of desired values of both the performance and the reception of song; they emphasize a fullness of absorption, a deep psychological fulfilment, in the experience of song. At the same time, the Muses' performances have inexhaustible scope. In addition to celebrating the divine world itself (11–21, 43–9, cf. 66–7) their songs have the capacity to roam across the entirety of 'present, future, and past' (38; cf. their instructions to Hesiod at 32), including the races of humans and Giants (50)—an obvious correlate of the *Theogony* itself. If Hesiod were a theorist of poetry, we could legitimately expect him to explain the relationship between the all-encompassing ambit of song as practised by the Muses and the duality of 'truth' and 'falsehoods that seem like true things' which they symbolically make available to human bards at 27–8. But not only does Hesiod not supply theoretical answers to such questions, he incorporates the resulting indefiniteness as an enigma in his own work—even an enigma to himself.³⁷

Hesiod certainly aligns his own self-image as singer with the qualities he pictures the Muses themselves as possessing. The Muses are the icon of his own work, not least in their beauty and their capacity to transport the mind.³⁸ But this also means that the boundaries between truth, falsehood, and the fiction of true-seeming falsehoods remain uncertain in Hesiod's own poetry, irretrievably so

³⁶ For the erotic connotations of the terms *ἡμερόεις* and *ἐρατός*, cf. ch. 2, 46–50, with nn. 16–17 there.

³⁷ *Theog.* 27–8 yields no strict inference about the poem's own status. A claim to pure 'truth' for the *Theogony* itself hardly follows (still less an encoded criticism of Homeric epic, *contra* e.g. Luther 1935: 125, Finkelberg 1998: 157–8); for limits on even the Muses' knowledge, cf. Belfiore 1985: 55–7. A simple comparison with Hes. *Op.* 10 ('I shall speak the truth to Perses'), suggested by e.g. West 1966: 162, Rösler 1980: 295 n. 31, Walsh 1984: 33, is misleading: truth in that context must be largely 'normative' or didactic, not narrative (as it would need to be if claimed for the *Theogony*), as well as implying truthfulness (see the Homeric use of *ἐτήτυμος* at e.g. *Il.* 22.438, *Od.* 1.174, 4.645); cf. Krischer 1965: 172–3.

³⁸ In addition to the direct patronage of the Muses at *Theog.* 96–103, note the correspondences between 22 and 8 (*καλός*), 32 and 38, 104 and 8 (*ἡμερόεις*), as well as the implications of *θέσπις* (32) and the merging of Hesiod's and the Muses' song at 104–15.

for us at this cultural distance. The *Theogony* may well be the oldest surviving Greek text to present the relationship between poetry and truth in explicitly problematic terms. It would be rash, however, to draw any conclusions from this about novelty or evolution in early Greek poetics, all the more so because the Homeric epics (whatever their chronological relationship to Hesiod) contain their own subtle gestures towards a poetics in which the role of truth is far from certain, as I shall contend at length in the next chapter.³⁹ The *Theogony* nonetheless stands as symbolic figurehead of a long-lasting Greek tradition which grapples with the insufficiency of a truth-falsehood antithesis as a means of capturing the value of what poetry offers its audiences.⁴⁰

We can observe something of the variety and intricacy of that tradition by moving now from Hesiod to my second example, Thucydides. That it is worthwhile to juxtapose in this way texts so remote from one another in both time and ethos is partly due to the fact that in defining a new model of historical writing Thucydides uses existing conceptions of poetry as a foil to his own incisively intellectual commitments. In a revealing passage from the famous funeral speech included in book 2 of the *History*, Pericles tells his Athenian audience that the achievements of their city are attested by ‘signs’ (σημεῖα) and ‘memorials’ (μνημεῖα) found all over the Greek world and require no panegyric words to enhance them. He reinforces his point by saying: ‘we need no Homer to be our eulogist, nor anyone else whose verses may provide intense pleasure in the immediate moment of

³⁹ Those who unwarrantedly adopt a ‘developmental’ model of early Greek poetics in this connection include Luther 1935: 124 (Hesiod ‘already’ moving beyond Homer), Lanata 1963: 21 (‘non è più . . .’), Verdenius 1983: 28 (‘Formerly . . .’), Walsh 1984: 22 (‘a new set of categories’); Ritoók (1989: 340) sets Hesiod’s supposed innovation against a fantasized prehistory for Greek views of song (‘originally songs were perhaps considered to be true *per se*!’), while Veyne (1988: 28) arbitrarily (and with some confusion) makes Hesiod question what no one had ever questioned before. Rutherford (2000), reviewing Finkelberg (1998), rightly registers broader reservations about historical evolution from a ‘poetics of truth’ to a ‘poetics of fiction’.

⁴⁰ Hesiod’s implicit tripartition—truth, falsehoods, ‘falsehoods that seem like true things’—finds later counterparts in various tripartite schemata for the truth-status of poetry: see Ch. 5 n. 18, with the long-range perspective in Rispoli 1988: 107–204. A close echo of Hesiod, as well as of Xenophanes B35 (n. 18 above), is Pl. *Resp.* 2.382d, where Socrates wants myths about the divine to ‘maximize the likeness of falsehood to truth’ (ἀφομοιοῦντες τῷ ἀληθεῖ τὸ ψεῦδος ὅτι μάλιστα), where *pseudos* is certainly not ‘lie’ but edges towards a notion of fiction: see Smith 1985: 27–32, Halliwell 2002a: 49–50, with Belfiore 1985 for the Hesiod–Plato nexus.

hearing but whose meaning will not withstand the truth of events'.⁴¹ Reading this sentiment in context, we can see that Thucydides makes Pericles express a contrast with several layers to it: between laudatory words in general and the significance 'legible' in the concrete reality of military and political actions; between poetic glorification and the self-sufficient material processes of history; and between immediate gratification and unfading truth. Pericles' words serve, in a characteristically subtextual manner, as a vehicle for the claims of Thucydides' own writing, which purports to be an exercise in permanent historical truth-telling rather than a pleasurable experience for its readers. Yet the passage's emphatic reference to poetry remains less than fully transparent. Why should Thucydides (make Pericles) draw a contrast with poetry at all? Why should he think it appropriate for Pericles to tell his mass Athenian audience, many of whom have already suffered greatly in the first year of the war with Sparta, that Athens needs no Homer to praise its achievements? If we try, on the basis of this and other passages, to reconstruct Thucydides' own attitude to poetry, the results are ambiguous.

Thucydides does not work with an absolute opposition between poetry and history. He shows no signs of supposing that all poetry is either sheer invention or intrinsically 'false'. On the contrary, he demonstrably assumes that there is a broadly historical underpinning to Homeric and other early (epic) poetry; hence his willingness to appeal to it, if with caution, as containing evidence for some of his beliefs about the past. He even extends that assumption into areas (such as the marriage of Tereus and Procne or the existence of tribes called the Cyclopes and the Laistrygonians) which modern scholars would take to be 'purely' mythological.⁴² Yet Thucydides also makes it clear that poetry is not tied (and therefore cannot be held) to the standards of strict veracity which he aims at himself. Homer,

⁴¹ καὶ οὐδὲν προσδεόμενοι οὔτε Ὀμήρου ἐπαινέτου οὔτε ὅστις ἔπεισι μὲν τὸ αὐτίκα τέρπει, τῶν δ' ἔργων τὴν ὑπόνοιαν ἢ ἀλήθεια βλάψει . . . : Thuc. 2.41.4. Cf. Rusten 1989: 161. See Gomme 1956: 128 for a different construal of the last clause quoted, with Lanata 1963: 251, Flory 1990: 198, for a different rendering again. Ford 2002: 128–30 (note *ibid.* 72 for a different translation) offers an interesting reading of the context. On the strength of the verb *τέρπειν*, see n. 46 below.

⁴² Thucydides' use of poetry as (qualified) evidence for early Greek history is apparent at 1.3.3, 5.2, 9.4 (with caveat), 10.1, 10.3 (with caveat), 13.5, 3.104.4–6. For Tereus and Procne, see 2.29.3; Cyclopes and Laistrygonians, 6.2.1: qualifications on the latter do not doubt the existence of early peoples with these names; cf. Hornblower 1987: 86–8, 1991–2008: iii. 264–6, 2004: 310–11 for discussion.

as a poet, is likely to have ‘enhanced and magnified’ things (ἐπὶ τὸ μείζον . . . κοσμήσαι, 1.10.3), though not so much that one cannot draw guarded inferences from his narratives.⁴³ That same phrase (ἐπὶ τὸ μείζον κοσμοῦντες, ‘enhancing and magnifying’) recurs at 1.21.1, where poetry is juxtaposed with the kind of prose-writing (including, probably, that of Herodotus) which allegedly prioritizes immediate audience satisfaction over truthful accuracy. Both kinds of composition, Thucydides insinuates, tend to push accounts of the past into the realm of ‘the fabulous’ (τὸ μυθώδες) or ‘the mythologized’. This expression identifies an attraction to elements of larger-than-life or far-fetched sensationalism, a category in which Thucydides the rationalist would certainly have included the notion of anthropomorphic gods who actively intervene in human events.⁴⁴ Works which give scope to this impulse inevitably detach themselves from some of the more stringent requirements of what can plausibly be believed about the world. For Thucydides, poetry is a form of discourse whose narrative basis obeys an imperative of imaginative enhancement and fictionalizing intensification.⁴⁵ Even so, it does not thereby break all its ties with the fabric of history; in Thucydides’ mind, it still seems bound to rely on historical events for much of its raw material. Whatever Hesiod’s Muses may have meant, Thucydides is drawn to a conception of poetry in which truth is a slippery factor—graspable only, indeed, with the help of the historian’s critical intellect.

⁴³ For the vocabulary of *kosmos* applied to poetry, see Ch. 2 nn. 97, 99. Pace Rood 2006: 235 n. 22, the implications of *κοσμεῖν* at Thuc. 1.10.3, 21.1 are different from Gorgias’ treatment of truth as the *kosmos* of discourse at *Helen* 1: see Ch. 6, 267.

⁴⁴ τὸ μυθώδες is expressly disavowed by Thucydides himself in the following chapter, 1.22.4: Flory (1990) stresses the phrase’s reference to ‘sentimental chauvinism’, including the glorification and heroization of war; Greenwood 2006: 21 detects an anti-theatrical slant; Gomme 1954: 117 narrows the sense too much. See Ch. 6, 291–4, for the same term in Isocrates, Ch. 7, 350 for Longinus, *Subl.* 9.13, 15.8. Williams (2002: 161–71) offers a philosophical reading of the contrast between history and myth in Thucydides. Cornford (1907: esp. 129–37) remains an overstated but interesting thesis that Thucydides partly succumbed to a mythologizing impulse in his own writing. For later Greek attitudes to the relationship between history and ‘myth’, cf. Walbank 1985: 224–41.

⁴⁵ Compare Aristotle’s principle that poetry must ‘make’/‘compose’ (ποιεῖν) its narrative materials into a coherent world (a unified *muthos*) of their own, even where those materials are taken from history, *Poet.* 9.1451b27–32. But see my text below for an important difference between Thucydides and Aristotle. For a modern perspective which finds fictional elements in Thucydides’ own work, see Grethlein 2010b: 324–9.

At the same time, Pericles' funeral speech draws attention to poetry's psychological powers of captivation: its capacity to give deep pleasure, in the act of performance (or reading). This captivation is clearly a process which draws audiences intensely, but also fleetingly, into the projected world of poetry.⁴⁶ But does Thucydides allow that it might involve anything more than superficial gratification? I think that he does: or rather, he implies that poetry's own audiences take it to do so. Pericles' denial that Athens needs a Homer to eulogize it presupposes an existing recognition that poetry can function as a means of creating or sustaining glorious renown and of thereby giving exemplary status to those whose stories it tells. This same function is marked by Thucydides in his own words at 1.21.1 and 3.104.5, in both passages using the verb *ὑμνεῖν* to denote the poetic act of 'glorifying' and 'celebrating'. This makes it all the more telling that in the funeral speech itself Pericles appropriates this same verb for his own eulogy of Athens, referring to 'the respects in which I have glorified the city'; what's more, in the same breath he speaks of the Athenians' own virtues 'enhancing' or 'embellishing' the city, applying to them the same verb (*κοσμεῖν*) used elsewhere of *poetic* embellishment (see above).⁴⁷ In the terms of Pericles' argument, then, the Athenians 'need no Homer' because they have not only proved themselves the makers of their own history but also effectively converted that history, with some amplification from Pericles' own voice, into the 'poetry' of their achievements.

In defining the importance of history partly by comparison and contrast with the purported values of poetry, Thucydides pays a kind of compliment to the latter. But it is a muffled compliment, since he betrays an inclination to diminish the cultural prestige of poetry in the interests of proclaiming the significance of his own work. To do this he makes Pericles split poetry's power to captivate the mind from

⁴⁶ The verb *τέρπειν* at 2.41.4 employs an old vocabulary for the intense pleasure of poetry (note the two cases from the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* quoted at Thuc. 3.104.4–5); see Ch. 2, 45–6, with Index of Greek Terms. Elsewhere in Thucydides, this word-group is often associated with pleasures set in specific counterpoint to the harsher side of life: the pleasures of peace as against war (1.120.4), escape from life's rigours (2.38.1), compensation for the decline of old age (2.44.4), pursuit of immediate gratification in the time of plague (2.53.2). The 'temporary' quality of such pleasure in the experience of poetry is matched by similar ideas in connection with rhetoric at 3.40.3, 6.83.3.

⁴⁷ ἃ γὰρ τὴν πόλιν ὕμνησα, αἱ τῶνδε καὶ τῶν τοιῶνδε ἀρεταὶ ἐκόσμησαν. . . , 2.42.2.

its truth-telling or truth-preserving credentials, conceding the former (though with a rhetorical slant which makes immediacy of impact a poor second-best to the lasting effects of history) in order all the more emphatically to downplay any claim to historical authenticity. Poetic memorialization, in epic and elsewhere, had always operated with a notion of *kleos*, renown, in which the relationship between report or reputation, on the one hand, and truth, on the other, was open to dispute and interpretation: hence, among much else, the alternative versions which different poets could provide of characters and events from the past.⁴⁸ The Thucydidean Pericles in effect severs poetic *kleos* from truth, turning it instead into a kind of mirage produced by the temporarily bewitching potency of poetic words. The message for Thucydides' own readers (as opposed to Pericles' original hearers) is that only the historian, not the poet, can enable us to know what the events of the past really amounted to. If there are vestiges of truth to be located in works of poetic memorialization, even those require the historian's judgement to test and verify them.

But Thucydides implicitly takes another step too in the elevation of history above poetry. If preserving the past was one possible aspect of poetic 'truth', another was that of instructive understanding of the human condition. Thucydides famously declares what he intends the value of his work to be for readers in the future: 'as for those who will want to examine a clear account of things which happened in the past and which will occur again in the same or similar form, given the human condition, at some point in the future, I shall be satisfied if they judge my work useful'.⁴⁹ This remark, which immediately precedes the most famous sentence in the entire work (the claim that the book 'has been designed as a possession for all time rather than a prize composition for recital here and now', *κτῆμά τε ἐς αἰεὶ μᾶλλον ἢ ἀγώνισμα ἐς τὸ παραχρήμα ἀκούειν ξύγκειται*), shows that Thucydides not only arrogates for history a degree of veracity about the past which he believes poetry cannot match, but also turns it into a source of essential truth about the conditions of human existence. Perhaps

⁴⁸ Cf. 16–17 with n. 33 above.

⁴⁹ ὅσοι δὲ βουλήσονται τῶν τε γενομένων τὸ σαφὲς σκοπεῖν καὶ τῶν μελλόντων ποτέ αὖθις κατὰ τὸ ἀνθρώπινον τοιούτων καὶ παραπλησίων ἔσεσθαι, ὠφέλιμα κρίνειν αὐτὰ ἀρκεύντως ἔξει: 1.22.4. See Connor 1984: 29 n. 28, Flory 1990: 193 n. 1, for an alternative translation of the sentence, with de Ste. Croix 1972: 29–33, Flory 1990: 202–8, Grethlein 2010a: 268–79, and esp. Rutherford 1994, for the implications of the passage; cf. Ch. 6, 311.

half a century before Aristotle was to restrict history to statements of particulars, reserving for poetry the quasi-philosophical capacity to convey 'universals', Thucydides couples knowledge of both particulars and universals together and places them firmly within the domain of history. In consequence he is able to anticipate a kind of didactic 'usefulness' or 'utility' for his work, here too transferring to his own writing a property which others wished to ascribe to poetry.⁵⁰

For Thucydides the rationalist, this seems to leave poetry with a severely attenuated value. Traces of truth about the past can be no more than a partial, contingent, and unreliable feature of poetry, something the student of history will turn to only as a *pis aller* and with caution. Closer to the intrinsic nature of poetry for Thucydides is a capacity to enrapture its audiences, to draw them into an imaginatively enthralling account of stories about the world. But while those audiences themselves may be lulled into taking their rapture for a contact with truth, Thucydides regards them as victims of a distorting illusion.⁵¹ On the historian's premises, there is little left for this rapture to do other than provide a kind of temporary respite from reality, a reality which can be grasped only by the exacting, critical pursuit of truth which Thucydides himself professes to practise. Whether fuller evidence for his views, if only we had it, would complicate this picture of Thucydides' attitudes to poetry remains an open question. The issue of his tacit rivalry with tragedy, of which it is hard not to detect resonance at several points in the *History*, is one intriguing consideration in this respect. It is a consideration compatible, however, with radically opposed alternatives: namely, that Thucydides saw in tragedy (partly subconsciously?) an insight into human existence which he wanted also to express through history, or that he thought *only* history had the authority to turn an unflinching gaze on the harshest truths of life.⁵² At whatever angle we hold the picture, it is hard to escape a sense that Thucydides' priority is to displace poetry with history as the master-art of human narrative and insight. Yet in doing so he discloses something of the strength of those poetic values against which he measured the aims of his own writing.

⁵⁰ On the vocabulary of 'utility' or 'benefit' (*ὠφελία* etc.) for poetry, see Ch. 6, 311–17.

⁵¹ 1.21.1 explicitly refers to those who naively trust (*πιστεύειν*) the extravagant accounts of poets, implying that they cannot distinguish between historical plausibility and 'the legendary' (*τὸ μυθώδες*); cf. n. 44 above.

⁵² For further discussion of the topic, see e.g. Cornford 1907: 137–52, 221–43, Finley 1942: 321–5, Macleod 1983: 140–58, Halliwell 2002c, Hornblower 1987: 113–19.

The history of Greek poetics, as the preceding pages have already signalled, begins inside not outside poetry. The poets are their own first interpreters, and some might say their best. But Greek poetry's impulses towards poetics—towards a discourse of reflection on the functions and values of poetry/song—are displayed in part by giving expression to problems and enigmas about its own status. We have seen a paradigmatic case of this in the notoriously riddling utterance of the Muses to Hesiod at *Theogony* 26–8. Both the Homeric epics as well are harbingers (and creators) of what were to become some of the central concerns of Greek poetics. There are, of course, inescapable differences between the, so to speak, proto-poetics embedded within these works and the theoretical conceptions of poetic value later elaborated by critics and intellectuals. Without overriding those differences, my next chapter will attempt to probe the powerful poetic self-awareness of Homeric epic by formulating a detailed response to the question, 'Is there a poetics in Homer?'

My answer will try to draw out how the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* share a sensitivity to factors which affect the significance and value of song in relation to different audiences and contexts of performance. It is no accident that both epics bring their protagonists into close and paradoxical encounters with song: in Achilles' case, above all when he sings a kind of epic (to/for) himself at the very time when he has withdrawn in anger and disillusionment from the world of epic heroism; in Odysseus', when he listens to the blind bard Demodocus at the Phaeacian court and is moved to request a song about himself which causes him emotional anguish. Both these examples reveal an underlying Homeric sense of the mind's *need* for song, a need which can even be figured as quasi-erotic desire. But they also provide instances of the complex psychological workings of that need. The epics show how song is a source of intense pleasure yet can induce a kind of pain; how the beauty and order of song can sometimes be found (as the openings of both epics imply) in telling of extremes of suffering; how song can suffuse the mind with entrancement, but might also paralyse it (as the existence of the Sirens darkly symbolizes); and how the impact of song generates difficult questions about the relationship between emotional authenticity and narrative 'truth', as we see in Eumaeus' shifting frame of mind in books 14 and 17 of the *Odyssey*.

A presumption of poetic truth in Homer has often been thought to follow unequivocally from the idea of the Muses as the divine patrons of singers and their performances. Nothing in Homeric epic, however, warrants the reductive (yet common) conviction that singers are mere mouthpieces of the Muses, nor that quasi-historical veracity captures the essence of what singers imagine the Muses as supplying or sponsoring. The Muses represent, *au fond*, the perfection of song to which human performers aspire and sometimes lay claim. But the idea of such perfection, I argue, involves an interplay between the circumstances of individual performances and the longing for a divine perspective which can transform human experience, including suffering, into objects of expressive beauty (and therefore objects of a yearning desire, *himeros*). Such interaction and such transformation cannot be accomplished merely by accurate 'information' about the past: it calls for a compelling intensity which Homer's vocabulary counts as a kind of entrancement or bewitchment—in other words (in the larger terms of my project), a state of imaginative and emotional ecstasy. Similarly, the importance in epic's self-image of the concept of *kleos*, 'reputation' or 'renown', resides neither in strict 'information' about the past nor in a wholly laudatory notion of glory, but in a kind of magnification of flawed human existence into a new substance, the 'immortal' medium of special stories which can sustain perpetually renewed experiences of song. Only a notion of the transformative power of song—the ways in which it constitutes something different from, and more than, the struggle of life itself—can do justice to those dramatically pregnant moments in which the chief heroes of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* display their own need for song. It is part of the profundity of Homeric epic that it makes song humanly indispensable yet leaves delicately uncertain the nature of whatever truth may belong to its psychological power. That is a key element in Homer's legacy to Greek poetics.

Chapter 3 moves from the world of Homer to the very different setting of Aristophanes' *Frogs* and its contest of tragedians. The importance of *Frogs* lies partly in its testimony to a culture in which analysis and appraisal of poetry had assumed (by a series of stages we cannot fully reconstruct) a highly articulate, even theoretical, form in its own right. But it is naive to suppose that *Frogs* deals with 'criticism' as a new phenomenon; Athenians had not been selecting, performing, and judging tragedies for a century and more without a body of oral discourse for interpreting and evaluating the genre. *Frogs* fixes its

comically unsparing sights, rather, on the recalcitrant problem of critical *conflict*: it lays bare the multiple possibilities of understanding, explanation, and preference which the history of responses to tragedy (and to poetry more generally) had brought into being.

My account of *Frogs* challenges a prevailing consensus which finds in the play a coherent, teleologically driven metapoetics—a dramatically encoded ‘message’ which supposedly gives political and moral meaning, as well as lending its own endorsement, to Dionysus’ eventual choice of Aeschylus over Euripides. I draw attention to a number of stumbling blocks for this way of reading the play: among them, the manner in which *Frogs*’ own spectators, as Euripides’ putatively decadent contemporaries, become ironically implicated in the dynamics of the contest; the comic demonstration of incommensurability between the principles employed by the opposing parties; the gap between technical analysis and critical evaluation; the strange absence of communication between the judge of the contest and the chorus which observes it (and applauds its outcome in rather surprising terms); and the failure of Dionysus to make any overall sense of the process which brings him to his final decision. My alternative to a teleologically unified reading of *Frogs* sees the play as following not a linear progression but a sort of zigzag path by which Dionysus comes to embody the acute difficulty, even impossibility, of making authoritative judgements of poetic value.

Dionysus starts *Frogs* as a passionate lover of tragic poetry, especially (though not only) of Euripides, a role heightened by his encounter en route to Hades with his brother Heracles, who is arguably given the traits of a cultural philistine. When called on to judge the contest of tragedians, Dionysus finds his own values thrown into doubt; he exhibits a volatility which echoes and partly internalizes the clashing viewpoints of Aeschylus and Euripides. By the end of the contest he is reduced to a bewildered gesture of ‘critical’ arbitrariness, selecting Aeschylus on a whim which he cannot even begin to justify: ‘I’ve decided that Aeschylus is the winner. Well why not?’ (ἐκρίνα νικᾶν Αἰσχύλον. τιῇ γὰρ οὐ; (1473)) is all he can say in self-defence to the indignant, betrayed Euripides. And in the comedy’s finale—a consideration too rarely reckoned with—Dionysus has nothing whatever left to say.

If there is a cumulative core of sense to the shape of *Frogs*, it lies not in the vindication of a ‘civic poetics’ of tragedy. It is to be located, instead, in a comic-cum-satiric exposure of the various dilemmas

which face attempts to construct a stable basis for assessing the workings of language, form, character, and emotion in the experience of (dramatic) poetry. Dionysus, conveniently the god of both comedy and tragedy and therefore a mobile symbol of theatrical spectatorship and judgement, becomes himself an embodiment of the impossibility of fusing a passion for poetry with an authoritatively rational means of pronouncing on its value. At the same time, this makes *Frogs* itself a triumph of *comic* poetry; the play rewards its own audience's capacity to savour a multifarious repertoire of quotation, allusion, parody, irony, and wider cultural reference, as well as setting up Dionysus as a character capable of revelling in his own confusions. From this angle, then, *Frogs* is a poetic celebration of the inability of a lover of poetry to understand his own passions. We do not need to turn Aristophanes into a literary theorist, nor to resolve his play's dazzling antinomies into a neat and tidy message, in order to see *Frogs* as achieving its own shrewd insights into problems of Greek poetics.

If adept interpretation of *Frogs* requires appreciation of the work's lack of a controlling authorial voice, the same holds good, with obvious differences of tone and nuance, for the various treatments of poetry found in Plato's dialogues. Too often, however, Plato's writings, like Aristophanes', have been subjected to readings which confidently distil from them a precise authorial message. Chapter 4 re-examines a number of these Platonic texts, in particular from the *Apology*, *Ion*, and *Republic* 10, and questions the one-sided modern orthodoxy which has turned Plato into an outright 'enemy' of poetry. I argue that an older tradition of interpretation, with representatives in antiquity, the Renaissance, and the period of Romanticism, was right to find signs of a persistent ambiguity and double-voiced quality in Plato's dealings with poetry—dealings in which, on my account, resistance *and* attraction to poetry's psychological power stand in an unresolved dialectic. I trace this dialectic back to a Platonic awareness that poetry can induce transformed states of consciousness whose strong allure is not fully amenable to rational analysis or to stable communication of truth. This makes poetry both seductive and dangerous, but it leaves open the question of its potential value in the philosophical scheme of things.

The problem of poetic value is aired briefly but thought-provokingly in a passage of the *Apology* which is more perplexing than many scholars recognize. Socrates' encounter with the poets hinges round a

disjunction between a (seemingly intuitive) perception of ‘many beautiful things’ (πολλὰ καὶ καλά) in poetry and the inability of poets themselves to provide a discursive account of what they or their works ‘mean’ (τί λέγουιν). On the most common reading, Socrates/Plato resorts to a theory of inspiration to close this gap. But I argue that there is no such thing as an unequivocally Platonic ‘theory of inspiration’, only an intermittent appeal to inspiration as a way of highlighting the tension between a desire for a rationally discursive poetics and, on the other hand, those elements in the experience of poetry (its imaginative vividness and emotional intensity) which block that desire. My interpretation gains cogency from the fact that in the *Ion*, standardly cited as expounding a theory of inspiration, the middle section of the dialogue where Socrates invokes a concept of ecstatic rapture on the part of poets, performers, and audiences does not yield decisive answers to the problems raised in the two outer sections of the work. The triptych structure of *Ion* gives shape to a philosophical conundrum. We start with the quest for an account of poetry and its interpretation (the two things being partially entwined throughout the inquiry) as rationally grounded in knowledge. Seemingly despairing of this, Socrates then advances his hypothesis, itself lyrical in expression, of inspired rapture (imaginative-cum-emotional ecstasy) as the state of mind in which poetry is both created and experienced. But that hypothesis is in turn put aside, and we return, in the final section, to an attempt to subject the domain of poetry to the terms of discursive rationality. If the *Ion* is a ‘statement’ of anything, it is of a puzzle about the source of poetry’s significance and value for the mind, not a confident solution to that puzzle.

A comparable ambivalence can be detected in the conclusion to the *Republic*’s second critique of poetry. Book 10’s discussion of poetry is almost universally adduced as the ‘proof text’ of Plato’s hostility to the poets and his determination to banish (most of) them from the ideal city (which is also the virtuous soul). Yet at *Republic* 607b–608b Socrates goes out of his way to modify, even suspend, the verdict of banishment. Using a richly eloquent mixture of judicial, erotic, and ‘psychotherapeutic’ tropes, Socrates depicts poetry, in the personified form of a woman, as an ambiguous object of desire. He speaks as one who has known the ‘bewitchment’ of poetry and would *like* to retain the experience (‘we would be happy to receive her back into the city’, ἄσμενοι ἂν καταδεχοίμεθα, 607c) if only a rationally justifiable defence of poetry’s ethical value could yet be established. For the time being,

people like Socrates and Glaucon will 'continue to listen' to poetry (a detail, usually ignored, which calls for delicate interpretation), though only under the protection of the 'incantations' of their own arguments about its dangers to the soul. Undertaking a close scrutiny of the intricate imagery of this fascinating passage, I argue that far from confirming the banishment of poetry, and far from promoting 'the ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry' (which Socrates mentions in an *apologetic* vein, in fact, at 607b), the text pointedly signals a lingering hope that the banishment might be reversed and that it might prove possible, after all, to remain a philosophical lover of poetry. This stands as Plato's great dilemma, his great unanswered question, about the value of poetry and the possibilities of poetics.

Chapter 5 reconsiders some fundamental aspects of Aristotle's conception of poetry, a conception which can be regarded as designed partly to satisfy, partly to reconfigure, Plato's requirements for a philosophical poetics. My reading focuses principally on the way in which Aristotle combines cognition and emotion in his model of poetic experience. This model, I argue, incorporates a kind of 'emotional understanding': understanding filtered through the evaluative responses embodied in emotions. The *Poetics* places great emphasis on the force of the emotions elicited by tragedy, employing the terminology of *psuchagôgia* (soul-changing enthrallment) and *ekplêxis* (emotionally stunning impact) while at the same time rejecting the mere frisson of shock effects (the spirit of *grand guignol*). It also imposes strong conditions of coherence, unity, and intelligibility on the mimetic structure of a poem. The result is an attempt to marry concentrated emotional authenticity with dramatic rationality, the latter bringing with it an underlying nexus of 'universals' through which poetry quasi-philosophically reflects the nature of the world. Aristotle asserts that poetry's standards of value are not the same as those of politics or of any other formalized domain of activity. He nonetheless ties poetry to the 'mimesis of life' and allows ethical principles to have some purchase on poetics, while tempering the implications of this with a rule of critical contextualism.

The second half of Chapter 5 aligns my account of 'emotional understanding' with the taxing problem of what Aristotle meant by poetic catharsis. I place the weight of my argument on the exegesis of parts of book 8 of the *Politics*, where we find a complex set of clues to the kind of psychological phenomenon which catharsis denotes in the experience of poetry and music. Contrary to the dominant 'purgation'

school of thought, I propose an interpretation of catharsis which tries to integrate psychology, ethics, and aesthetics. *Politics* 8, if read carefully (not least with attention to its distinction between catharsis for pathological and for normal minds), does not divorce musico-poetic catharsis from Aristotle's view of the ethical significance of emotional responses to mimetic (i.e. representational/expressive) art-forms. It also supplies reasons to suppose that catharsis is closely associated with, but not identical to, pleasure. Tragic catharsis is best understood, I maintain, as the 'benefit' accruing from the conversion of painful into pleasurable emotions within the contemplation (*theôria*) of mimetic simulations of reality. This reading allows catharsis to be harmonized with Aristotle's moral psychology as a whole: emotional responsiveness to 'aesthetic' objects can contribute to the appropriate exercise of ethically attuned judgements. Catharsis—Aristotle's reaction, in part, to older Greek beliefs about the soul-transforming powers of verbal and musical arts—is not just the end-result of watching a tragedy. It supervenes on the entire cognitive-cum-emotional experience.

Chapter 6 discusses three prose-writers who all evaluate poetry within a larger framework of ideas about the nature of language and discourse. The argument of Gorgias' *Helen* engages with poetry on several levels: as the source of inherited stories about Helen; as a paradigm of the power of discourse (*logos*) to compel and seduce the minds of its audiences; and as a model for Gorgias' own quasi-poetic style and the status of *Helen* itself as a kind of prose-poem. Gorgias' speech opens with a resounding statement that truth is the most beautiful condition of *logos*, before proceeding to make much of the drug-like ability of language to delude its hearers. Poetry, in this setting, becomes the bearer of a paradox. Its power of 'deception' (which Gorgias elsewhere makes central to the psychological impact of tragedy) is presented as something valuable in virtue of the strength of imaginative engagement with 'the lives of others' it entails. Yet no discourse, it seems, can be simply exempted from the requirement to strive for the beauty of truth. Gorgias considers credibility (*pistis*) and deep pleasure (*terpsis*) as desirable properties of poetry, but he leaves it unclear how they relate to one another. Something analogous holds for his treatment of painting and sculpture in sections 18–19: while discussing the capacity of vision in general to cause mental disturbance, Gorgias adduces what seems the special case of figurative art, whose fabricated forms provide intense pleasure and

even what he paradoxically calls a 'pleasurable disease'. By simulating reality, poetic and visual art can achieve something more than ordinary deception; it remains uncertain, however, just what kind of experience this stands for in Gorgias' argument. Whatever the larger upshot of *Helen* (and I dispute the common view that it propounds a form either of relativism or of philosophical scepticism), Gorgias seems caught between ascribing to poetry a seductive life of its own and aligning it with the tenet that all *logos* should aim to speak the truth about the world ('not the nature we merely want things to have, but the nature each thing actually has', as he puts it in the case of vision).

Isocrates, who may have studied with Gorgias, is obsessed in a way the latter never was with downplaying the cultural authority of poetry in order to assert the superiority of his own pragmatist educational philosophy. Isocrates was accused by others of neglecting the educational importance of poetry; his promised defence to this charge (12.34) never materialized. While he sometimes couples poets, as purveyors of 'advice for life', with intellectuals like himself, he can also attack the former, not wholly unlike Plato, for purveying pernicious myths about gods and heroes. At the same time, Isocrates clearly implies that 'the mythical' *per se*, which he frequently appeals to in his own work, is not the problem. He considers the archive of myth to be a mixture of 'historical' memorialization and (sometimes legitimate) invention. The same stories can exemplify significant truths about the past and be told with a psychagogically powerful effect on the minds of audiences, especially an effect of emotionally reinforced ideology (such as hatred of barbarians). But the two things can start to pull in different directions. Isocrates, not unlike Thucydides, complains that the masses prefer narrative excitement to edifying reflection; even Homer and tragedy pander to such needs.

Both in his own writing and in what he expects of poets, Isocrates himself reverses that order of priority: he subordinates imaginative immediacy to sober sagacity. Homer's images of deliberating gods, for example, are stripped of divine drama and interpreted as showing us, a fortiori, the impossibility that merely human minds could ever know the future. Isocrates' constant concern with the encomiastic exemplarity of heroic myth leads to a narrowing of vision: the *Iliad* is reduced to a vehicle for encouraging hatred of barbarians. This is the result of the filter of pragmatic utility—the exclusive Isocratean test of

every form of thinking—through which the richness of poetic myth is strained. Despite a surface resemblance between their moral questioning of certain myths, Isocrates entirely lacks Plato's alertness to deep problems in the psychology of poetic experience. Where Plato had seen surrender to emotion in the tragic theatre as exposing the complex dynamics of the mind, Isocrates draws a merely cynical contrast between emotions experienced in the theatre and the lack of pity shown by Athenians in real life. The importance of Isocrates' relationship to poetry resides not in anything he says about poetry on its own terms but in his demonstration of how a pragmatist agenda effectively brings with it an indelibly prosaic perspective on the world.

The final figure examined in Chapter 6 is the Epicurean controversialist Philodemus. The difficult fragments of his treatise *On Poems* indicate that, through an extensive sifting of earlier poetic theories, Philodemus tried to steer a route between the Scylla of moralism (subscribed to by those who equated the value of poetry with edification or ethical benefit) and the Charybdis of formalism (represented by extreme euphonists who took the value of poetry to consist entirely in the sensory properties of its language). Ostensibly anticipating A. E. Housman's claim that 'poetry is not the thing said but a way of saying it', Philodemus endorsed the contention that 'it is not the function of poets to say what no one else could, but to say things in a way which no non-poet does'. He also, however, disputed that the essence of poetry was a matter of stylistic or compositional features treated independently of 'thought' or 'content'. Philodemus insists that there is a distinctively poetic 'way of saying things' which involves both the linguistic medium and the 'things said'. But since something comparable (and comparably indefinite) might be said about certain non-poetic forms of discourse, what exactly do we learn from this?

In resisting the imposition of rigid critical dogmas on poetry, Philodemus adopts a stance which appears both subtle and elusive. 'The goals of poetic excellence', he writes, 'are given by our underlying conceptions: in verbal form, to give a mimetic version of a style which teaches beneficial things; and as regards content, to engage in the kind of thought which is midway between that of the wise and that of the masses.' One striking feature of this position, I tentatively suggest, is its construal of the status of poetry in terms of fictive speech acts: mimesis operates here not at the level of the poem's general

relationship to reality but as a form of simulated discourse. But where does this leave poetic 'thought'? Philodemus' demarcation of it as inhabiting a zone midway between the philosophical and the banal betrays a failure to recognize that there are, and can be, no boundaries at all to the (potential) scope of poetic thought. Part of what makes Philodemus interesting for my purposes is that in arguing for a tight bond of expressiveness between poetic language and thought ('a matter of linguistic expressions which signify thought by being composed in a certain way') he nonetheless shows himself unable to secure a case for the self-sufficiency of poetry's value to the mind: unable, that is, to locate in the experience of poetry a value which belongs to it alone.

Chapter 7 concludes the project of this book by analysing how the author ('Longinus') of *On the Sublime* brings together certain traditions of both poetico-rhetorical criticism and philosophical metaphysics in such a way as to fuse the values of 'ecstasy' and 'truth' into a new paradigm of the mind's responsiveness to creativity of thought and feeling in language. Much of Longinus' emphasis is placed on sublimity as an overwhelming, even 'coercive', impact—an effect, as he puts it, reaching 'beyond persuasion'. But this transfigurative, ecstatic dimension is closely combined with a cognitively grounded intersubjectivity according to which the sublime allows great thoughts and intense emotions to be communicated between minds and to reverberate with a fresh charge of creativity at every stage. Thus, what on one level is a 'loss of (normal) self' in the moment of contact with the sublime can also be seen as an activation of the mind's deepest capacities.

In the course of developing this account of *On the Sublime* I examine a series of key ideas and passages in the work, arguing that the Longinian sublime always involves a 'surplus of meaning' which permits the experience of it to be not only repeated but extended by cumulative contemplation. I also maintain that unlike some eighteenth-century theorists Longinus does not see sublimity as an index of human limitations but rather as heroically (self-)affirmative, a kind of thrilling celebration of the mind's own powers. Finally, I suggest that we can trace in the treatise a notion of sublime truth not as a set of fixed propositions about reality, nor as a unified message embodied in the complex structures of whole works, but as an amalgamation of intuitive, emotional, and implicitly metaphysical components. The metaphysics of the sublime, however, is not

a matter, as many have thought, of the author's affiliation with a particular school of philosophical doctrine. It is focused instead on the mind's heightened awareness of its capacity to transcend the boundaries of finite, material existence, and to discover a kind of liberating infinity in its own thoughts and feelings.

Is there a Poetics in Homer?

What does the song hope for?

(Auden)¹

CONTEXTS, EFFECTS, AND DESIRES IN HOMERIC IMAGES OF SONG

The history of ancient Greek poetics begins inside not outside poetry. It is a salient feature of the entire ‘song culture’ of archaic Greece that in every major variety of poetry—epic, didactic, elegy, iambus, as well as the various types of lyric or melic—there is a role for reflection, whether direct or oblique, on the functions and values of poetry itself (or, in the first instance, of ‘song’).² It is the poets, through this metapoetic component of the worlds of thought and feeling they present, who set large parts of the agenda for the subsequent phases of more theoretically articulated poetics practised by critics, philosophers, and other intellectuals in Greek culture. As that initial formulation acknowledges, however, there are important differences of discursive status between the proto-poetics found inside poetry and the more abstract plane of argument and conceptual analysis on which the later theory and criticism of poetry came to be situated. Two subtly contrasting models of the relationship between ‘internal’

¹ ‘Orpheus’, in Auden 1991: 158.

² Lanata (1963) remains a usefully documented anthology of early Greek conceptions of poetry/song (see Ch. 1 n. 8 on the twin terminology; it serves no purpose to distinguish the two in archaic Greece: Dover 1987: 1). Maehler (1963) is perhaps the best general survey, though at times schematic and narrow in its interpretations.

and 'external' modes of poetics might be proposed. One, in brief, involves thinking of the poets themselves as preparing the ground, and in a sense helping to expose the need, for poetics: in a partial, inchoate manner, they voice ideas and sentiments which have the potential to be elaborated into independent paradigms of reflective theory. The other model involves, so to speak, a reversal of priorities. This alternative will hold that poetic theory needs poetry more than poetry needs poetic theory. From this perspective, the poets are not forerunners of theorists; rather, the critics are themselves 'latecomers'. And the history of poetics, accordingly, is not teleological: the most urgent, difficult problems of poetics were already there in poetry to begin with, intimated (as well as produced) by poets themselves.

The present chapter will test the difference between the two models just mentioned, and in the process align itself with the second of them, by exploring the most challenging case we have of a particular form of early Greek 'proto-poetics' in operation within poetry itself: that of Homeric epic. There is no better way of gaining an immediate sense of what is at stake here than by foregrounding two extraordinarily resonant but perplexing images of song from the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, each involving the central hero of its respective work. The first occurs in *Iliad* 9.186–91 at the point where the embassy sent by Agamemnon to appease Achilles and persuade him to return to the battlefield finds the young warrior in his tent, singing to his own accompaniment on an exquisitely beautiful lyre. Achilles is singing of 'the renown of men' (κλέα ἀνδρῶν), a phrase which in some sense (though one which will call for further discussion) can be regarded as descriptive of Homeric epic itself. The pointed paradox, however, is that Achilles is singing 'epic' at the very juncture of events when he has withdrawn, in turbulent anger and profound disillusionment (feelings expressed with vehement insistence just a little after this very passage), from the world which ascribes to him his heroic identity as supreme warrior. He is singing, then, of the very world on which he has turned his back—and singing of it for himself alone, despite (so I shall argue) the presence of Patroclus. Yet the Homeric narrative recounts that Achilles found keen pleasure in his singing. How can this be so? What gratification can he obtain from singing, in his brooding alienation, about the kind of existence which has plunged him into such torment and which he will shortly think of repudiating for ever?

Now juxtapose with Achilles' private, paradoxical performance of his own epic the scene at the Phaeacian court in *Odyssey* 8 where Odysseus, having been earlier reduced to sobbing with grief by Demodocus' song about an episode involving himself (and Achilles) during the antecedents to the Trojan war, actually requests another song about himself from the blind Phaeacian bard. If the earlier song was a source of acute pain to Odysseus and caused Alcinoüs, anxious about his guest's frame of mind, to suspend Demodocus' performance, why does Odysseus ask to hear another such song, one which he might expect, and which indeed turns out, to have the same disturbing effect on him? The conundrum is all the more remarkable for being embedded in the only context in the entire poem where the remorselessly self-disciplined hero appears practically to lose control over his own emotions. Although Odysseus weeps freely in several other places (on the shore of Ogygia, for instance, or when encountering in Hades his mother and others dear to him),³ nowhere else is he overwhelmed by tears which he feels a pressure to try to conceal. Very different is the way, for example, in which he 'easily' hides from Eumaeus a discreet tear for his old dog Argos at 17.304–5; and there is an especially marked contrast with those situations in which Odysseus calculatedly cloaks his own feelings in order to test others—most poignantly, when he induces Penelope to weep profusely while himself maintaining unflinching eyes 'of horn or iron' (though also, in a trope that captures a deep characteristic of his mind, weeping *inwardly* with pity).⁴ If Achilles, the last person ever to hide his emotions, strangely finds gratification in epic song at the very moment when tumultuously at odds with his life-defining status as hero, how can it be that Odysseus, the ultimate paradigm of self-mastery, is overcome by uncontrollable grief when contemplating, also in such song, his own past as a leading warrior—and yet should ask for more? Elsewhere in the *Odyssey* we encounter the thought that there can be a kind of solace in recalling times of sorrow from a later vantage point of tranquillity. But in *Odyssey* 8 we seem to have the puzzling

³ *Od.* 5.82–4, 11.55, 87, 95, 466. These and other passages are unfortunately missed by Schopenhauer 1988: ii. 688, tr. in Schopenhauer 1966: ii. 592, when arguing that Odysseus' tears in response to Demodocus' (first and third) songs are those of self-pity; cf. n. 90 below.

⁴ *Od.* 19.203–12, with 212 for his metaphorically 'concealed' tears. Cf. Rutherford 1992: 164–6.

reverse of this: the unforeseen arousal of sorrow by memories of former triumphs.⁵

How are we to interpret the double contrast between these two unforgettable images of what poetic song can do to the minds of the greatest heroes (a pair of images, moreover, which give the lie to Auerbach's thesis that there are no shadows or gaps, nothing left unexpressed, in the psychology of Homeric characters)?⁶ Does it make a difference that in Achilles' case the almost solipsistic solitariness of the song is matched by the fact that its specific contents are not disclosed (*whose* renown are we to imagine him singing?), whereas in *Odyssey* 8 the audience of the Homeric epic is given a kind of tantalizing résumé of Demodocus' final song, an echo, as it were, which momentarily seems to become the song itself before fading into the distance again?⁷ Or might it be that, beneath the dissimilar surfaces of their circumstances, there is something which draws the two songs towards a shared significance? Could it be that Achilles and Odysseus, despite the contrasting conjunctions of pleasure and pain which define their situations, seek the same thing in the experience of song? And how important is it that in both cases there is a sharp disjunction between the impact of song on the individual hero and the surrounding social setting in which that individual is located?

To find meaningful, satisfying answers to such questions is difficult, maybe impossible. But it is a crucial feature of both these Homeric scenes that they present the two heroes as somehow *in need* of song, while providing no explicit account of what that need (paradoxically pleasurable for Achilles, paradoxically painful for Odysseus) amounts to in each case. When I return to these scenes later on, I shall suggest that they prompt in audiences of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* a desire for explanation to which the epics themselves withhold (complete) fulfilment, and that it is precisely by doing so that they enact an essential part of their own poetic expressiveness—and perhaps their

⁵ Solace in recalling past sufferings: *Od.* 15.400–1 (cf. *Arist. Rh.* 1.11, 1370b1–7); cf. e.g. Ach. Tat. *LC* 8.4 and see n. 28 below. In book 8 Odysseus sees even his former successes within a perspective of unhappiness (79–91 below); compare the sentiment famously expressed by Francesca da Rimini at Dante, *Inferno* 5.121–3 (derived from Boethius).

⁶ Auerbach 1953: 5–7.

⁷ At 8.500–13 the résumé has a syntactical form indistinguishable from the primary epic narrative. But 514, 516, and 519 contain reminders of the distance between the Homeric narrator and Demodocus' 'actual' song.

own poetics. The implications of that compound claim can hardly be expected, however, to stand alone. They call for the support of a wider perspective on Homeric images of song, a perspective organized around the question: is there a unifying vision, a coherent constellation of values, behind the various appearances which song makes in the world(s) of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*? In short: is there a poetics in Homer?

One does not have to move far in modern Homeric scholarship to find that talk of the presence of a 'poetics' within the epics themselves is extremely common; some scholars are even prepared to equate the idea with a Homeric 'theory' of poetry. There is extensive disagreement, however, about exactly how and where a Homeric poetics is to be discovered. In particular, there is a recurrent fluctuation between attempts to identify a more or less manifest paradigm of poetic values in epic descriptions and scenes of song, and, on the other hand, an understanding of Homeric poetics as constituted by a set of practices, conventions, and expectations woven into the very fabric of the epics (and perhaps encoded in a traditional system of oral poetics). But the picture gets more crowded still. More than one recent scholar has gone so far as to diagnose a degree of tension, even contradiction, between the ostensible and the implicit, confronting us with the possibility that there may even be a Homeric poetics in evidence in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* which is not the poetics 'of' Homeric poetry or song itself. And to add yet another layer of complexity, there are those who find distinct conceptions of poetry—separate, and again perhaps partly incompatible, poetics—in each of the two epics. Taking the current state of scholarship as one's cue, then, it might be tempting to rephrase the issue as a pair of questions: *how many* poetics are there in Homer? and which of them, if any, is/are Homer's (where 'Homer', as throughout my discussion, is equivalent to the textually embodied designs of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*)?⁸

⁸ For references to Homeric 'poetics', see e.g. Macleod 1983: 4, Cairns 2001b: 24–33, Redfield 1994: 23 (equivalent to the 'meaning' of Homer's own poetry), Walsh 1984: 5 (two 'distinct poetics' in the *Odyssey*: cf. nn. 32–3 below) and 14 ('Homer's traditional poetics'). Pucci 1998: e.g. 78 ('the entire poetics of the *Iliad*'), 82 ('the poetics of the *Odyssey*, a poetics of disguise') effectively equates 'poetics' with 'thematics', as many critics now do; at pp. x–xi he moves closer to how the poems 'speak about the function of the poetry they recycle [*sic*]'. Finkelberg 1998: 131–50 thinks the Homeric 'poetics of truth' partly at odds with the poems' own practices.

The problem of Homeric poetics is certainly not factitious. It is generated by the inbuilt poetic (not 'authorial') self-consciousness of the works themselves, a self-consciousness that ranges from invocations to the Muse(s), via the monumental narrative ambitiousness of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, to vivid depictions of a song culture within the epic world itself. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to engage in detail with (or even to mention) every one of the various positions that have been marked out in the vigorous debates of modern scholarship in this area. The investigation of a putative Homeric poetics can legitimately be tackled on more than one level. Comparative Indo-European studies, for instance, have a contribution to make; they can do so especially by correlating themes visible in Greek epic with other branches of Indo-European poetic tradition and elucidating a model of epic song as a memorializing vehicle for the fame of great warrior-heroes whose life-stories help to define the values of those communities which look back to them. But for my purposes such an approach supplies part of the long-range cultural ancestry of Homeric epic, rather than a way of getting closer to the question whether there is a distinctive version of an epic poetics discernible within the intricate individuality of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.⁹

Something similar might be said of approaches which translate the idea of Homeric 'poetics' into the reconstruction of systems of oral composition. This angle of view can throw light on narrative and structural conventions which are likely to have been grounded in long-standing traditions of performance, and which may carry with them certain ways of shaping (the experience of) poetic meaning. But quite apart from the formidable question of how far the Homeric epics are exemplary products of oral tradition, how far works which conspicuously *breach* the norms and redefine the potential of such tradition, it is striking that oralist criticism also tends to be preoccupied with a poetics that is, as it were, hard to dissociate from the entire fabric of Homeric song/poetry. That may make sense if the goal, as

Ledbetter 2003: 10–14 (etc.) moves from 'Homeric poetics' qua an 'implicit account of the connections among poem, poet, and audience' to the Homeric 'theory' [*sic*] of poetry, which she in turn takes to be a 'rhetoric' and 'strategy' for promoting entrancement in the audience of Homeric poetry itself; she finds a tension between 'theory' and 'practice' (34–9). Mackie 1997: esp. 78, 94, resists a synthesized Homeric poetics in favour of different conceptions of song in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.

⁹ West 2007: esp. 26–74, 403–10, supplies a *tour d'horizon* of Indo-European poetics; see also Katz (2010) on the more technical sides of the subject. Cf. n. 79 below.

already indicated, is to understand the larger compositional 'systems' which are taken to underlie the production of traditional epic. But the results seem to fall short of providing a way of addressing such specific, even unique, problems as the singing of Achilles in *Iliad* 9 or the apparent compulsion of Odysseus to expose himself a second time to song-induced grief in *Odyssey* 8. To find a suitable standpoint from which to scrutinize such extraordinary narrative moments, we need to work much more closely with the irreducible particulars of the two epics.

Since my own concern in this book is with some of the most difficult issues which arise from Greek attempts to articulate the values of poetic experience, the focus of this chapter will be fixed on those elements in the Homeric epics which bear more or less explicitly on performances of, and responses to, song. The presence of such elements certainly encourages the quest for a Homeric poetics. But I differ from many recent critics, of various persuasions, in believing that there is no method by which to synthesize Homeric representations and descriptions of song into a wholly unified paradigm of poetic values, let alone into a transparent self-image of Homeric epic. Even much of what a majority of scholars suppose to be fundamental components of a Homeric poetics—including the motif of the epic singer as inspired with knowledge by the Muse(s), the model of epic as celebratory of heroic glory, and the conception of song (of many kinds) as a purveyor of pleasure—is less secure and more complex, I submit, than appears at first sight.

The ideas just mentioned, of epic as a form of truth, glorification, and pleasure, are both voiced and yet qualified within Homeric poetry. They are made available as strands of a possible poetics, yet refused the status of definitive answers to the searching questions about poetic value which the epics themselves prompt. To almost every observable facet of the workings of song in Homer, there is, so to speak, a counter-image also in evidence: the pleasure of song is counterbalanced by the (sometimes unbearably) painful feelings it can cause; its bewitching power is associated both with intense emotional satisfaction and yet also with the risk of deception or illusion (or even, at the extreme symbolized by the Sirens, with a form of psychic paralysis); its claims and/or aspirations to a more-than-human capacity for truth are never vouched for by voices that are not themselves human; its beauty stands at times in a disturbing dialectic with representations of horror. Tensions such as these

thwart any pursuit of a fully harmonized scheme of poetic values. This is not simply because a Homeric poetics, being embedded in dramatico-narrative rather than propositional form, lacks the discursive means to achieve complete elaboration. (All poetics, however formulated, are necessarily incomplete.) It is because the expressive power of Homeric song itself enacts an awareness—one of the great legacies of Homer to later Greek criticism—of the ways in which the values (and problems) of poetic experience run deeper than the possibilities of a codified body of principles.

Homeric representations of and references to song embrace more than heroic narratives of the kind which Achilles sings to himself in his tent or Demodocus sings to the Phaeacians and Odysseus, and which are (partial) mythical correlates of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* themselves. They also include wedding songs, laments, harvest songs, paeans, the (obscure) 'Linus song' of *Iliad* 18.570, and even 'burlesques' about the gods (if that is the appropriate word for Demodocus' remarkable telling of the adultery of Ares and Aphrodite in *Odyssey* 8, in between his two songs about the Trojan war). In addition, we hear of both Calypso and Circe singing as they work at their looms, and of unspecified song types which accompany social dances such as those of the suitors and the Phaeacians in the *Odyssey* or the young men and women at *Iliad* 18.590–606; we might also perhaps posit some kind of 'pastoral' song that goes with the music of the herdsmen's pipes as evoked on the shield of Achilles.¹⁰ If we wish to speak here, loosely at least, of a configuration of 'genres', it seems most obvious to do so in the first place on the basis of social context and function. There is, however, an important reservation to be added to that general premise. Homeric images of song typically depict a social occasion or setting within which the performance takes place, but they also convey features of the psychological impact of song: this second factor stands in a variable and not always symmetrical relationship to the ostensible social function of the performance. While those two things—social setting and psychological impact—may be wholly congruent, as with, say, the wedding hymns which resound through the streets (with dancers, musicians, and a torchlit procession) in celebration of a group of marriages shown on the shield of

¹⁰ Herdsmen's piping: *Il.* 18.525–6; cf. the Trojans' music at *Il.* 10.13, where singing may also be implied. On Demodocus' 'burlesque' of divine adultery, see my discussion of the problems of tone in Halliwell 2008: 77–86.

Achilles (*Il.* 18.491–6), there may also be a degree of anomaly or friction between them. Any cogent account of a Homeric poetics needs to accommodate the uncertainties that can impinge on the relationship between the contexts and the effects of song.

This is most strikingly so, though in different respects, with the cases of Achilles in *Iliad* 9 and Odysseus in *Odyssey* 8 which I adduced at the start of the chapter and will later discuss in more detail. In fact, if we add the further case of Penelope's distraught reaction to Phemius' song of the 'return of the Greeks' in *Odyssey* 1, it transpires that all three major Homeric scenes of the performance of epic itself involve some kind of exception to, or fracturing of, the integration of song into a social context where it can function reliably as an agency of group feeling. In each of these instances, the special psychological reactions of individual hearers—in Achilles' case, performer and audience rolled into one—change not only the conditions of performance but the *meaning* of the song. The potential asymmetry between social setting and psychological response introduces complexity at the heart of Homeric conceptions of song, a complexity highlighted in relation to epic itself but not exclusive to it, as my later discussions will try to show. Nor, where the performances portrayed in *Odyssey* 1 and 8 are concerned, can we simply take the presence of larger, collective audiences as embodying 'norms' of poetic experience against which Penelope and Odysseus stand out as deviant. Neither the suitors (because of their ethical and emotional decadence, as well as their blindness to the latent message for *themselves* in Phemius' song) nor the Phaeacians (because of the peculiar status of their society) can be thought of as straightforwardly typical, let alone normative, audiences.¹¹ These considerations pose a challenge for any attempt to uncover (or construct) a Homeric poetics. In the epics' own terms of reference, there is no easy way of identifying a

¹¹ The suitors' silent listening, *Od.* 1.325–6, may be 'fascinated attention' (West, *CHO* i. 116–17), but perhaps significantly the verb *τέρπειν* (n. 13 below) is not directly applied to them; Telemachus' comment at 1.347 is generic and externalized (in later scenes, 17.605–6, 18.304–6 have a broad social import). It is also doubtful, pace Finkelberg (1998) 94, whether we should infer that the suitors are 'entranced' (i.e. objects of *θέλγειν*). Certainly, the suitors cannot know that they too will be victims of Athena's revenge. See de Jong 2001: 34–5, with Svenbro 1976: 20, Bowie 1993: 16–17, for the different view that Phemius' song actually includes the 'death' of Odysseus (as some ancient critics thought, Σ^{EHR} 1.340); but cf. Rüter 1969: 205, Ford 2002: 6 n. 12, Scodel 2002: 83–6. On the Phaeacians, see 77–9 below.

stable alignment between social and psychological dimensions of poetic experience.

If we return now to the bigger picture, perhaps the one and only thing which virtually all Homeric images of song have in common is an impression of the intense absorption belonging to the experience of words, music, and sometimes dance as well. In all its varieties, song produces states of rapt concentration and engagement; even where total immersion is modified by other psychological impulses (as, in subtly different ways, with both Penelope and Odysseus), song is seen to exercise a compelling grip on the mind.¹² But what is it that induces such intensity of response? Homeric vocabulary for the qualities and effects of song provides one obvious though partial set of clues to this cardinal issue of poetics. I do not want here to re-examine this vocabulary systematically; nor, indeed, do I believe that systematic analysis is the best way of doing justice to the resonances with which images of song are invested by their narrative and dramatic contexts. Some specific points of interpretation will be pursued further in the course of my argument. But it is nonetheless worth noticing briefly how certain elements of the Homeric lexicon of song endow its impact on human (and divine) minds with a special intensity of experience.

The most basic level of poetic experience in Homer is, unsurprisingly, a matter of 'pleasure' or 'gratification', signified above all by the verb *τέρπειν*/-*εσθαι* (give/take pleasure) and its cognates (though the noun *τέρψις* occurs in Hesiod but not Homer). These terms, widely used of many things in Homer (including eating, drinking, sex, and sleep), are stamped with strong associations of deep fulfilment or release; they often carry quasi-physical connotations even where thought or emotion is concerned.¹³ It is also highly pertinent that

¹² On the special cases of Penelope and Odysseus, see 79–83 below. Striking instances where characters, under countervailing influences, do not *listen* to a song being performed are Telemachus (talking to Athena-Mentes) at *Od.* 1.156–7 (cf. 346–59, misunderstood by Walsh 1984: 139 n. 44), and Odysseus (longing for home) at 13.27–30.

¹³ *τέρπειν* etc. of song (or music/dance) in Homer: *Il.* 1.474, 9.186, 189, 18.526, 604, *Od.* 1.347, 422–3, (4.17), 8.45, 91, 368, 429, 12.52, (13.27), 17.385, 606, 18.305–6, 22.330 (*Τερπιάδης*, Phemius' patronymic); cf. the lexicographical survey in Latacz 1966: 174–219. The noun *τέρψις*: Hes. *Theog.* 917. The intensity of *τέρπειν* is well illustrated by Telemachus' response to Menelaus' words at *Od.* 4.597–8, where *αἰνῶς* ('terribly', often associated with fear or anger) is attached to the verb: this is not mere enjoyment (note Telemachus' tears, 4.113–16, with n. 83 below) but total emotional

the language in question can be applied to the experience of grief-laden weeping, an application which contains a recognition that such weeping somehow gives powerfully ‘psychosomatic’ expression, even a kind of satisfaction, to the pressure of feelings involved.¹⁴ The ‘deep pleasure’ in song which *terpein* denotes is also projected onto the gods themselves, not least in the person of Apollo, the divine *phorminx*-player (*Il.* 1.474). Yet this item in the Homeric vocabulary does not in itself purport to identify the root of the psychic gratification afforded by song, or even to determine *whether* it has a single root, a point whose ramifications are important for my argument as a whole.¹⁵

The intensity implied by *terpsis* terms is matched and reinforced by the vocabulary of *ἔμερος*, ‘desire’ or ‘craving’, with the verb *ἰμείρω* and adjectives *ἰμερόεις*, *ἰμερτός* (the latter often translated ‘lovely’, which tends to bleach out the more vivid colour of ‘desire-arousing’). The semantics of *ἔμερος* are often clearly erotic, though also capable of application to longings for such different things as cool night air and death.¹⁶ When applied to the qualities of song (or music and dance), in Homer as well as in archaic Greek poetry more generally, the word-group captures a sense that this realm of experience arouses

absorption; cf. n. 28 below. But Onians (1951: 20–1) draws from *τέρπειν* the spurious historical inference that ‘men then lived more for the moment’; similar inferences to a whole cultural mentality in Schadewaldt 1965: 83–6. Cf. Ch. 6 n. 14.

¹⁴ See *Il.* 23.10, 98, 24.513, *Od.* 4.102, 194, 11.212, 15.399–400, 19.213, 251, 513. Cf. n. 18 below.

¹⁵ Inferences like those of Walsh 1984: 5 (the expectation that song ‘should provide pleasure, *simple and unmixed*’ (my emphasis), cf. *ibid.* 3, with nn. 32–3 below), Hainsworth, *CHO* iii. 349 (the purpose of song ‘is frankly entertainment’), Ford 1992: 18 (‘always and only pleasure’, together with other cut-and-dried distinctions), or even Garvie 1994: 245 (*τέρπειν* shows that poetry’s aim is ‘to give pleasure, not to instruct’: but see *Od.* 12.188 for the *idea* of combining both, though the Sirens are disingenuous; cf. n. 111 below), involve unwarrantedly restrictive formulations. Cf. n. 50 below.

¹⁶ Cool night air, *Od.* 1.555; death, *Od.* 1.59. Erotic uses include *Il.* 3.397, 446, 5.429, 14.163; cf. Hes. *Theog.* 132, *φιλόγητος ἐφιμέρου* (‘passion-rousing lovemaking’), and see 48–9 below. A good treatment of the word-group by de Jong in *Lfgre* ii. 1191–5; cf. Fernández-Galiano, *CHO* iii. 309–10, Havelock 1963: 154, Ritoók 1989: 334–7, with nn. 17, 24 below. At *Hom. Hymn* 4.422, 434, *ἔμερος* and *ἔρος* are synonyms for the longing aroused in Apollo by the music of Hermes’ lyre; see Görgemanns 1976: 122. Cf. *ἰμερόεις* of the Muses’ dances (with next note) at Hes. *Theog.* 8, *ἐρατός* of their voices *Theog.* 65 (following reference to Himeros), and the same adj. of the ‘gift of the Muses’ at Archil. 1.2 *IEG*, with Archil. 22 for near-synonymy of *ἐρατός* and *ἐφιμέρος* (similarly, Alcman 27 *PMG*). The poet is master of *ἰμερτῆς σοφίης* in Solon 13.52 *IEG*. For a later case of *ἔμερος* qua desire-stimulating property of an object, note Ar. *Lys.* 552. Cf. Ch. 3 n. 16.

and satisfies a strong impulse of attraction, a longing to be drawn imaginatively into the world conjured up within the song. The point is salient in the passage of *Odyssey* 17 where Eumaeus tells Penelope that the entrancing tale he heard from the beggar was like the ‘captivating words’ (ἐπεῖ ἱμερόεντα) of a singer whose audience ‘compulsively desire to hear him (τοῦ δ’ ἄμοτον μεμάασιν ἀκουέμεν), whenever he sings’.¹⁷ As with *terpsis* terms, so with *himeros* and its cognates, it is revealing that words which befit the heightened desire induced by song can also characterize the experience of weeping profusely with emotion (of more than one kind). In addition to setting up the paradox that even the expression of grief can yield a kind of gratification, such usage allows us to glimpse an underlying hint of possibilities of emotional complexity in the experience of song itself.¹⁸

There is also a link visible here with the language of ‘entrancement’ or ‘bewitchment’ (θέλγειν), a spellbinding influence over the mind with which another term, *κηληθμός*, seems near-synonymous.¹⁹ The idea of *thelxis* (though the noun as such is not found in any early Greek text) is applied to poetic experience only in the *Odyssey*, but it overlaps with conceptions of song discernible in the *Iliad* as well. *Thelxis* characterizes at its highest, most intense pitch the condition of rapt absorption and (in the etymological sense) fascination which is a recurrent feature of Homeric images of song. The verb *θέλγειν* is used twice by Eumaeus in the same passage, quoted above, where he compares Odysseus to a mesmerizing bard. Penelope uses the noun

¹⁷ *Od.* 17.518–21, where Russo, *CHO* iii. 43 arbitrarily takes ἐπεῖ ἱμερόεντα to refer to ‘the sound itself’. Note that the verb μάω (μέμαα), mid. μῶσθαι, is taken as etymology of *Μούσα/μουσική* at *Pl. Crat.* 406a. On Eumaeus’ words, cf. further at 51–3 below. Other *himeros* terms of song/music/dance: *Il.* 18.570, 603, *Od.* 1.421, 18.194, 304, 23.144. Cf. Feeney 1993: 235, esp. n. 13 *ad fin.*, on the importance of ‘desire’ more generally in Greek responses to poetry, and see my discussion of the erotic simile at *Pl. Resp.* 10.607e–8a in Ch. 4, 197–9.

¹⁸ ἱμερος . . . γόοιο vel sim.: *Il.* 23.14, 108, 153, 24.507, 513–14, *Od.* 4.113, 183, 10.398, 16.215, 19.249, 22.500, 23.231. *Arist. Rh.* 1.11, 1370b24–9 explains the paradox as combining pain of loss with pleasure of memory.

¹⁹ Near-synonymy is shown by *Od.* 10.329, where Circe calls Odysseus’ mind ἀκήλητος, i.e. immune to her power to θέλγειν; cf. 10.326. *κηληθμός* is used uniquely of the ‘spell’ cast on the Phaeacians by Odysseus’ autobiographical narrative, *Od.* 11.334, 13.2, a spell which continues after the narrative ceases/pauses and is only broken by the intervention of another speaker. *Arist. Eth. Eud.* 3.2, 1230b35 uses *κηλεῖν* of the irresistible effect of the Sirens’ singing (cf. next note); compare its application to music at *Pl. Prt.* 315a (Orpheus), *Symp.* 215c (Marsyas), *Resp.* 3.411b, to rhetoric at e.g. *Eup. fr.* 102.6, *Pl. Euthd.* 290a, *Phdr.* 267d, *Menex.* 235b (Ch. 7 n. 11), and to poetry at *Pl. Resp.* 10.601b, 607c (Ch. 4, 196–7).

θελκτήρια to describe Phemius' repertoire of entrancing song, and she does so to emphasize her own painful inability to endure his song about the 'grievous return-journey' of the Greeks from Troy. The verb is also found in Circe's description of the overwhelmingly seductive but destructive allure of the Sirens, the ultimate (and hauntingly mysterious) emblem of the irresistibility of song.²⁰ The last case is all the more intriguing in view of the fact that Circe's own psychotropic drugs are themselves described with the same vocabulary.²¹ The usage of the *Odyssey* as a whole suggests that there is a spectrum of means of entrancing 'entrancement' or 'bewitchment' which encompasses supernatural powers of mind-control (sometimes to the point of hallucination) but also the persuasive sway of words, whether human or divine. It also suggests that the effect of such entrancement on those who experience it may be beneficial or malign, according to circumstances. The *Iliad* employs *θέλγειν* in compatible ways but over a narrower range: it refers predominantly to the ability of gods to throw human minds into confusion, delusion, or panic.²² None of this, it should be noticed, sits easily with the standard idea (soon to be addressed) of a Homeric 'poetics of truth'.²³

One should not press too hard the absence from the *Iliad* of *θέλγειν* terms applied to song. As we have seen, Eumaeus links poetic entrancement (*θέλγειν*) closely to the captivating, desire-arousing (*ἱμερόεις*) powers of song, and the latter motif does occur in the *Iliad* as well, though its direct reference there is to song's 'sister arts' of lyre music and dance. In larger terms, the *θέλγειν*-*ἱμερος* nexus is highly charged: in its purest form *ἱμερος* is a component of the erotic resources of Aphrodite, explicitly among the entrancements

²⁰ *Od.* 17.514, 521 (Eumaeus), 1.337 (Penelope), 12.40, 44 (Sirens). I can see no reason to follow Heubeck, *CHO* ii. 128 in limiting the Sirens' *θέλγειν* to the sound of their voices, nor Finkelberg 1998: 96–7 in restricting 'pleasure', independently of *θέλγειν*, to their voices. On the Sirens, cf. 91–2 with n. 111 below.

²¹ *Od.* 10.213, 291, 318.

²² See *Il.* 12.255, 13.435, 15.322, 594, 21.604. Hermes' hypnotic staff at *Il.* 24.343 matches *Od.* 5.47, 24.3. The other two *Iliadic* uses are 14.215 (see my text) and 21.276, where Achilles suspects that his mother tricked him with falsehoods (comparable, after making allowances for Thetis's divinity, to e.g. *Od.* 14.387: see, again, my text).

²³ Rösler 1980: 294–5, Walsh 1984: 6–7, 16 (NB 'perhaps!') are among those who posit the interdependence of truth and bewitchment in Homeric song. But *θέλγειν* is so evidently compatible with deception (as underlined by Eumaeus at *Od.* 14.387, μήτε τί μοι ψεύδεσαι χαρίζεο μήτε τι θέλγει: cf. 50–1 below) that the thesis is intrinsically dubious; cf. Pratt 1993: 73–81.

(*θελκτήρια*) of her symbolic breastband in *Iliad* 14.²⁴ Given that there are also associations and parallels between the *ἕμερος*-arousing qualities of song and the language of *τέρπεσθαι* common to the vocabulary of poetic experience in both epics, we have here a sort of web of connections which holds together the significance of song in the *Iliad* as well as the *Odyssey*.

The main difference detectable between the two epics in this respect is a matter more of dramatic emphasis than of underlying poetics. In comparison to the 'peacetime' conditions which prevail in the societies portrayed in the *Odyssey*, the pressures and oppressions of war in the world of the *Iliad* limit the opportunities and contexts for song, restricting the selection of song types which can find a purpose in such circumstances.²⁵ This fact, thrown into relief by the wider variety of song contexts depicted on the shield of Achilles, makes all the more notable the occasional vignettes of song which do occur in the poem (several of which I shall return to), including Achilles' own singing in book 9, the army's paeans in books 1 and 22, Helen's premonition at 6.357–8 of future songs about the terrible events in which she herself is implicated, and (doubts about authenticity aside) the evocative night-time image at 10.13 where the sight and sound of the Trojans' revels round their campfires increase the anguish of the watching Agamemnon but also symbolize the city's delusions of success and its blindness to the future. Song is rarer in the *Iliad* than the *Odyssey*, but its psychological impact is no less strikingly registered at those moments when, despite (or because of) the violence of war, it comes briefly into view.

The perceptions of song to which the vocabulary of *τέρπεσθαι*, *ἕμερος*, and *θέλγειν* contributes should not be treated as forming a 'system' of poetic principles. They amount, rather, to an expressively coherent but incompletely integrated set of impressions.²⁶ There is

²⁴ *Il.* 14.215; cf. the stunning effect of Aphrodite's breasts on Helen at 3.397, a remarkable moment. At Hes. *Theog.* 64 a personified Himeros (cf. 201) resides, with the Graces, next to the Muses on Olympus: the juxtaposition magnifies the quasi-erotic resonance of the language of desire/desirability as applied to song, dance, etc. in epic diction (see Hes. *Theog.* 7–8, 104 for parallels to Homeric phrasing). Cf. n. 16 above.

²⁵ The Iliadic treatment of dance/music (qua emblems of peacetime 'song culture') as inferior to war is always voiced by characters, never the narrator: see esp. 3.54, 393–4, 15.508, 24.261, 16.617–18. Menelaus takes a different view, 13.634–9. Cf. 73–4 below.

²⁶ The thesis of Finkelberg (1998: 88–98) that entrancement (*θέλγειν*) can be aroused only by 'new' songs (NB the concession in 94 n. 80) reflects a schematic approach to Homeric poetics (as part of a 'Homeric system of views', 29); it depends on such unfounded premises as that 'Homeric man [*sic*: an illegitimate hypostasis]

convergence towards a conception of experience in which minds are drawn with the force of irresistible desire into the events and emotions of a song-world, spellbindingly conjured up with musically augmented words. But the affinities (including those with erotic passion and with divine mind-control) which hold Homeric images of song within a web of values is not without uncertainties or ambiguities. We can find a rich illustration of this point by returning to the case of Eumaeus' description to Penelope of the storytelling powers of the beggar he has brought with him to the palace (47 above). Taken against the full background of its dramatic setting, in relation first to the actual telling of Odysseus' 'Cretan' narrative in book 14 and then to the swineherd's report to Penelope in book 17, the comparison of Odysseus to an entrancing, bewitching singer has more than one layer of significance. In book 14 Eumaeus had found the beggar's story of his sufferings and wanderings deeply moving: 'oh my unhappy guest,' as he exclaimed there, 'how you stirred my heart with the details of your sufferings and wanderings', ἄ δειλὲ ξείνων, ἦ μοι μάλα θυμὸν ὄρινας | ταῦτα ἕκαστα λέγων... (14.361–2). He had instinctively believed the main substance of the beggar's narrative, but refused to believe his claim to have heard reliable news of Odysseus or his concomitant prediction of Odysseus' return (14.363–5). He regarded the latter as sheer mendacity (ψεῦδεσθαι, 365), contrived by the guest to win favour from his host. Having been previously deceived and disappointed by a visitor's reports of Odysseus (14.378–85), he was determined not to fall into the trap a second time.

Moreover, at the outset of his conversation with the beggar Eumaeus mentions the frequency with which visitors to Ithaca are motivated by self-interest to lie to Penelope herself about Odysseus' whereabouts (14.122–32).²⁷ He therefore deprecates the beggar's attempt to raise his hopes about his master, insisting 'do not try to gratify or delude me with your falsehoods' (μήτε τί μοι ψεύδεσσι χαρίζο μήτε τι θέλγε, 14.387). Eumaeus' use of the verb θέλγειν in this line entails a blurring between two shades of the word's meaning already noted above: he clearly connects it with the idea of manipulative deception; but at the same time he regards this deception as executed by the engrossing form of an emotional

sees no point in listening to the same story twice' (93). Mackie (1997: 81) goes too far in equating newness of song with 'sophistication' on the part of its audiences.

²⁷ The needy visitors of 124–5 have nothing to do with 'oral poets', *contra* Nagy 1989: 32.

narrative to which in principle he might succumb. Despite Eumaeus' attempt to recognize the difference between truth and falsehood in that narrative, the scene communicates a delicate combination of points, one on the level of psychology, the other on that of dramatic irony. The first is that Eumaeus, precisely in his position as receptive, sympathetic listener (he had specifically requested the life-story of his guest's woes: 14.185–90),²⁸ is anxious about the power of a vividly gripping story to beguile the hearer into confusing emotional intensity with truth. The other is the poignant irony that Eumaeus, in his goodness of heart and his sensitivity to others' sufferings, has got it badly wrong: he has believed the fake armature of the Cretan autobiography (which does, however, contain several elements of camouflaged Odyssean truth), yet he is convinced of the falsehood of the crucial thing—Odysseus' return—whose truth is being plotted and acted out before his very eyes.²⁹ Not only, then, is the impact of *thelxis* independent of truth; it may even interfere with the capacity to recognize truth. Eumaeus is a lover of emotional narrative who cannot fully fathom or control his own susceptibility to it.

These intricate layers of meaning are then recapitulated but also modified in the passage of book 17 where Eumaeus describes to Penelope the seductive fascination of the beggar's stories. This occurs when Penelope, having learnt of the beggar's presence in the palace (and of his maltreatment by Antinous), summons the swineherd to ask him to bring the man to her, so that she can discover whether he has heard any news about Odysseus. Eumaeus' response can only be appropriately interpreted, and yet makes somewhat elusive sense, in the light of three key details we gathered in book 14: that Penelope always interrogates (but perhaps never believes, 14.122–3) visitors who bring reports of Odysseus (14.128); that Eumaeus himself has become incredulous on principle about all such reports; and, finally, that he was deeply moved by the beggar's life-story as a whole. When Eumaeus tells Penelope without qualification—and, significantly, in

²⁸ In book 15, Eumaeus is just as eager to narrate his own woes: see 15.398–401, with 38–9 above, for his desire to find gratification even in recounting past sufferings; note, again, how *τέρπεισθαι* (400) connotes deep feeling not detached enjoyment: cf. n. 13 above. See Odysseus' response at 15.486–7, precisely if ironically matching Eumaeus' to his own story (14.361–2).

²⁹ Redfield (1994: 37) bafflingly presumes that the true part of Odysseus' story is 'less carefully told and thus less convincing'. His statement, *ibid.*, that Odysseus 'tells Eumaeus almost nothing but lies' is also a simplification: cf. the valuable note of de Jong (2001: 353–4). For further thematic elements in book 14, see Goldhill 1991: 37–42.

this order—that ‘your heart would be bewitched’ (θέλγοιτό κέ τοι φίλον ἦτορ) by the stories the beggar tells, that these stories, told in the captivating (‘desire-arousing’) language of a divinely gifted bard, ‘bewitched’ *him* too, and, finally, that the beggar claims to know that Odysseus is alive and not far from Ithaca (17.513–27), he must be taken either to be suppressing, for Penelope’s sake, the adamant doubts he expressed in book 14 about all reports of Odysseus, or to be betraying (to an alert audience of the *Odyssey*) that he is not himself sure after all just how far to extend his doubts.³⁰

Either way, Eumaeus’ double use of the verb θέλγειν, together with his comparison of the beggar’s speech to that of an outstanding bard who can keep an audience entranced by his every word, at least partly overrides the clear distinction he tried to make in book 14 between those parts of the visitor’s story he found both moving and believable and, on the other hand, the parts which (*must also have* moved him, being about his beloved master, but which) he refused, or could not bring himself, to believe. In what Eumaeus says to Penelope, the idea of narrative ‘bewitchment’ is no longer restricted to the suspected lies of the beggar, as it was at 14.387, but is now expanded to cover his life-story in toto. Emotional authenticity and biographical truth have become, it seems, inextricably confused, either in Eumaeus’ own response (the response of someone certainly in conflict about whether to believe that Odysseus is still alive³¹) or in his expectations of how the story will affect Penelope; and this confusion has come about as the result of an experience which the swineherd can compare only to the irresistible appeal of an exceptional bard’s storytelling. The implications of this wonderful Homeric moment for the audience of the *Odyssey* itself hardly yield a clear-cut paradigm of poetics, since we are able to see that Eumaeus himself is both susceptible to the

³⁰ Olson (1995: 127) thinks Eumaeus is ‘considerably more credulous than he pretends to be’; this obscures the delicate psychology of his portrayal (cf. next note). The use of Eumaeus’ case by Verdenius (1983: 27) as evidence that there is *no* Homeric doubt about poetry’s truth-status misses the points made in my text. For the larger thematics of doubts about Odysseus’ survival on the part of his family and friends, see de Jong 2001: 25 (with further references there). Steiner (2010: 143–6) provides sensitive commentary on 17.513–27.

³¹ The conflict is cumulatively conveyed by fluctuation between denial, uncertainty, and hope: 14.42–4, 133–7, 363–71, 423–4, 17.240–3, 312, 318–19. All this is blunted by the heterodox reading of Roisman (1990: 218–38) that Eumaeus covertly recognizes Odysseus in his hut.

emotional authenticity of Odysseus' song-like narrative but also ambivalent about how far to equate this authenticity with truth.

The role of Eumaeus as a kind of metaphorical audience of epic (an audience, that is, of a narrative performance which forms a partial analogue of epic within the world of the poem) makes him one of a series of figures—together with Odysseus himself, Penelope, and (in the *Iliad*) Achilles, all to be treated in more detail below—who provide important test-cases of the problems raised by a putative Homeric poetics. Eumaeus' case, as I have tried to show, is more complex than is sometimes appreciated.³² We cannot infer from his words anything straightforward about (Homeric) ideas of song, except that he takes the best singers to represent the deepest form of emotionally engrossing narrative. Another way of putting the point is to say that in his sympathetic receptiveness to others' sufferings—indeed, his *desire* to hear their stories—Eumaeus can be considered an 'exemplary' audience for epic.³³ But in the fraught uncertainty which he feels (a product of his own unhappiness and near-despair over Odysseus' return) about what is and is not credible in the stories that move him, his exemplarity becomes a vehicle of one of the most subtle challenges which Homeric epic poses for its own audiences. In his beautifully portrayed character, Eumaeus is an indispensable part of the *Odyssey's* own 'emotional authenticity'. But to what kind of poetic truth is he thereby a witness?

Any attempt to answer that question will obviously depend on what counts as the possible 'truth' of epic, a question somewhat complicated by the fact that the vocabulary of ἀληθείη, ἀληθής and other relevant terms (ἀτρεκής, ἔτεός, ἐτήτυμος, ἔτυμος, νημερτής) happens never to be used of either Muses or bards in Homeric epic.³⁴ For many

³² Walsh (1984: 5) adduces Eumaeus for the supposedly standard view that song should provide pleasure 'simple and unmixed' (cf. n. 15 above, n. 33 below). This neglects the complexity of Eumaeus' response to what he hears in book 14; furthermore, the comparison at *Od.* 17.519–21 hardly implies, in context, 'simple and unmixed' pleasure, since Eumaeus is informing Penelope about a visitor who has stories about Odysseus himself.

³³ De Jong (2001: 198) explicitly makes Eumaeus a model for Homeric audiences on account of his emotional engagement. By taking poetic entrancement (*thelxis*) to involve impassivity and loss of self-awareness, Walsh (1984: 14–20) distorts the significance of Eumaeus' uses of θέλγειν (cf. previous note).

³⁴ Graf (1993: 72) erroneously claims that epic poets use ἀτρεκής of their work and the Muses. On the early Greek understanding of truth, see Cole 1983, Pratt 1993: 17–22, Williams 2002: 271–7. Cf. the still useful though somewhat mechanical treatment of vocabulary in Luther (1935). The extensive classification in Levet (1976) is marred by a misguided attempt to systematize Homeric usage.

modern scholars, Homeric epic predicates of itself a mode of truth-telling which amounts to a kind of historical veracity, the full and accurate relating of a heroic past in songs performed by human bards but informed by the divine knowledge of Muses. One of my purposes in this chapter is to suggest that this model of self-predicated epic truth is far less secure than it is often taken to be. More specifically, it may be no easier for Homer's audience than it was for Eumaeus to disentangle the truth which epic purports to offer from the experience of seemingly self-authenticating dramatic and emotional intensity.

Another passage which points in this same direction, but has lent itself to misunderstanding, is the trust which Alcinous expresses in the truthfulness of Odysseus' account of his wanderings at *Odyssey* 11.363–9. Some critics have maintained that in comparing his guest's storytelling to that of a bard Alcinous presupposes the intrinsically veridical status of ('epic') poetry itself. But the implications are more indeterminate than this. Contrasting Odysseus with impostors whose cunning lies cannot be seen through on the surface (366, a line with obvious ironic resonance for an audience of the *Odyssey* but which also adds to the intricacy of the king's judgement), Alcinous does not claim to *know* that Odysseus is telling the truth. He places a strong trust in him on the basis of a compound instinct of his reliability: an instinct informed by a visual appraisal of him (363) and a sense of his beautiful eloquence (*μορφῇ ἐπέων*), impressive mind (*φρένες ἐσθλαί*, a phrase which might be thought to imply intelligence and/or ethical integrity), and his bard-like assuredness in storytelling. Despite radical differences between their background psychology, Alcinous' position as audience/interpreter is in three key respects close to that of Eumaeus as discussed above: he is aware (366) that stories can be false yet convincing; he nonetheless feels confident that he can make intuitive judgements of a person's truthfulness or an account's veracity; and he perceives an affinity between emotionally engrossing face-to-face narrative and the masterly storytelling of singers, an affinity which makes song a medium of psychologically compelling authenticity but leaves its status on the scale of truth and falsehood unsettled.³⁵ Both

³⁵ Heath (1985: 261–2) gives a deft analysis of Alcinous' remarks; cf. Pratt 1993: 67–9, 92–3. Walsh (1984: 6–7) garbles the logic of the lines, which do not 'deduce' truth from 'poetic beauty'; similarly Finkelberg (1998: 130). Goldhill (1991: 47–8) is more alert to the nuances of the passage, though he confuses ancient doubts about Odysseus' and Homer's veracity; cf. Halliwell 1997b: 223, 231 n. 4.

Eumaeus and Alcinous passionately if obliquely avow the value of song, but neither can definitively say in what that value resides.

The position I am developing here, then, involves a set of important supplements to and modifications of a conception of epic truth as quasi-historical. Such a conception should not be seen as a free-standing entity, a fixed datum or doctrine, in the Homeric epics, but as part of a larger dialectic of ideas about the meaning and value of song. In the next section, I shall follow some of the threads of that dialectic by starting with a few remarks on the Muses, then moving out from them to the burden of human emotion carried by the two paeans sung by the Greek army in the *Iliad*, and finally turning to Achilles himself as a solo singer, isolated in his tent, in *Iliad* 9. My guiding aim is to explore areas of salient contrast (and potentially powerful tension) in Homeric images of song: between the Muses as all-seeing observers of the world and as emblems of divinely beautiful song; between epic as aspiring to (Muse-inspired) insight and as a vehicle for a 'renown' or 'reputation', *kleos*, which cannot validate its own veracity; and between the ideal expressiveness of song projected onto the Muses and the incomplete expressiveness of human song itself. At the core of my argument is a contention that any underlying notion in Homer of the 'truth' of (epic) song is always filtered through, and complicated by, a sense of the intensity of emotional absorption which the best songs are shown as arousing in their audiences.

THE MUSES' DIVINE PERSPECTIVE: TRANSMUTING SUFFERING INTO BEAUTY

The status and significance of the Homeric Muse(s) (singular or plural, for Muses are divine singers who might be pictured as performing either solo or in chorus, and as giving either individual or collective assistance to human singers³⁶) have been the subject of extensive comment by scholars. The resulting gamut of views

³⁶ The question of singular versus plural references to the Muse(s) in Homer should be kept in proportion; see Heubeck, *CHO* iii. 366–7. Alternation between singular and plural occurs readily in later authors too: e.g. Simon. 11.16/21 *IEG*, Pind. *Pyth.* 1.2, 12, 58, *Nem.* 7.12/77, *Isthm.* 2.2/6, Pl. *Ion* 533e, 534b–c, 536a. Cf. n. 53 below.

encompasses everything from acceptance of the Muses as objects of a full-blown religious belief in an external conduit of knowledge (their voices perhaps even taken to be literally audible to singers) to treatment of them as figures in a culturally symbolic rhetoric of bardic self-presentation, an icon of the special quality and authority which singers claim for their work.³⁷ There is, of course, no means of recovering the personal convictions, the inward cast of mind, of archaic Greek singers; equally, though, no obligatory reason to suppose that the idea of the Muses' agency was wholly perspicuous even to the self-understanding of bards themselves. It is prudent, however, to recognize in the invocations and descriptions of Muses in Homer the possibilities of a double-layered, 'interactionist' model of the production of song, with divine endowment and human motivation imagined as operating in tandem—hardly a surprising model, given that even a skill like carpentry can be regarded as implementing a divine 'gift' (*Iliad* 15.411–12). Enlightening in this connection is, for instance, Alcinous' description of Demodocus as someone to whom a deity (perhaps a Muse) has given a capacity of song which he can activate by the urgings of his own mind, *thumos* (8.44–5); at the same time, the narrator can present this same capacity as being prompted by a Muse herself (8.73).³⁸ We find in Homer a revealingly manifold vocabulary for the relationship of Muses to human singers: a Muse's actions or interventions can be described in terms of telling, reminding, giving, teaching, prompting, and 'implanting' song themes in

³⁷ For some orientation, see Murray 1981: 89–91, Harriott 1969: 10–46, both citing earlier scholarship. Sophisticated accounts of the Muse(s) as part of a poetic rhetoric include de Jong 1987: 45–53, Scodel 2002: 65–89; cf. 'rhetoric of enchantment', Ledbetter 2003: 18. For literal 'audibility' of Muses, see Dodds 1951: 117, speaking of Hesiod not Homer: cf. Most 2006: pp. xiii–xiv; cf. Smith 2007: 116–20, a larger study of auditory hallucination.

³⁸ This undermines the schematic dichotomy of Finkelberg (1998: ch. 2) between activities for which humans are and are not responsible. At *Od.* 8.45, *ἔπειθ' ὁ θυμός*, 'in whatever way his mind impels him' (cf. Telemachus on Phemius at 1.347), takes the bard to choose how to use his divine gift, *contra* Finkelberg (1998: 42 n. 34), who wrongly denies that promptings of the *thumos* can be 'deliberate' (35, jumbling several psychological concepts); contrast Garvie (1994: 245), with Clarke (1999: 277–8) on compatibility between divine involvement and human responsibility. Finkelberg (1998: 53) also illegitimately infers from *Od.* 8.499, *ὁρμηθεὶς θεοῦ ἄρχετο* (dubiously translated as 'was stirred by the god and began'), that the stimulus here lies outside the poet's responsibility; similarly Wheeler 2002: 33 n. 6, but contrast West 1966: 151, Garvie 1994: 335, Hainsworth, *CHO* i. 379. Compatibility between a Muse's inspiration and the human singer's creative effort is stressed by Murray 1981: 96–7, de Jong 1987: 52, 227, 2006: 191–3, Brillante 2009: 23–9.

bards; they can also be said to 'love' the singers they help.³⁹ That does not look like a list of synonyms. It suggests complex variation, in part between a 'gift' for song and specific uses of the gift in contingent human circumstances. On an imagistic plane at least, this vocabulary can be construed as depicting a kind of idealized equivalent to the multiple functions served by teachers of singing or music: Muses are instructors, mentors, supporters, as well as, when need be, consummate performers in their own right. There is no justification to be found here for the reductive view that Homeric singers are thought of as mouthpieces, passive instruments, of a Muse who supplies them with their 'factual' information.⁴⁰ The overall impression of the two epics is that, however vital the Muses may be (and however dangerous to claim independence of them, as Thamyras rashly did), their value to a singer never erases a human phenomenology of performative impulses, expertise, and memory.⁴¹

³⁹ 'Tell' (ἔσπετε, plural (*Il.* 2.484, 11.218, 14.508, 16.112), or ἔννεπε, εἰπέ, singular (*Il.* 2.761, *Od.* 1.1, 10)) is ambiguous between 'tell the story yourself' and 'tell me, the bard, so that I can perform the song': the latter must apply at *Il.* 2.484 at least (given 493); ἐν(ν)έπειν can elsewhere refer to conversation (e.g. *Il.* 11.643, *Od.* 17.549), while Hes. *Op.* 1–2 connects it with singing (but Hes. *Theog.* 114–15 implies support of the human song, *Theog.* 104). Cf. n. 45 below, with West 1981: 112–14, Kirk, *IC* i. 166–7, de Jong 1987: 46, Nagy 1990: 21. 'Remind' or 'call to mind' (μνησαίετο, *Il.* 2.492), if not interpolated (West 2001: 177–8; but cf. de Jong 1987: 48), intimates performative memory/concentration as much as 'historical' accuracy. (The same verb, μμνήσκομαι, is used in epic diction for singers' own choice of themes, e.g. *Hom. Hymn* 2.495, 3.1, 7.2; cf. West 2007: 34.) 'Teach' (*Od.* 8.481, 488, cf. Hes. *Theog.* 22, *Op.* 662) acknowledges by implication the existence of ordinary human instructors, pace Scodel 2002: 73; cf., later, Eur. fr. 663. 'Implant' (ἐμφύειν, *Od.* 22.348) denotes something assimilated into the singer's nature, *physis*, so there is nothing 'supernatural' here, pace Wheeler 2002: 33; cf. the verb ὀπάζειν, 'bestow', at *Od.* 8.498, used of a divine gift of beauty and courage at *Il.* 6.157. A divine endowment does not, *contra* e.g. Finkelberg 1998: 54, contradict Phemius' claim to be 'self-taught' (22.347), which is only a denial of human teaching (e.g. West 1978: 322); Fernández-Galliano, *CHO* iii. 280 confuses dramatic psychology with quasi-historical inferences about bards. 'Loved' by the Muses: *Od.* 8.43, 481, Hes. *Theog.* 96–7. For further Muse-related imagery, cf. Nünlist 1998: 326–8.

⁴⁰ For such a view, see e.g. Lanata 1963: 2, Rösler 1980: 294–7, Walsh 1984: 13–14 ('the facts exactly'). Finkelberg (1998: esp. 131–50) modifies such views by seeing a tension between Homeric theory and practice; cf. n. 8 above. Contrast Pratt 1993: 47–52.

⁴¹ Thamyras' story, *Il.* 2.594–600, though a cautionary tale, implies that a singer might *feel* autonomous; further interpretation in Brillante 2009: 91–120. Capacities 'possessed' by a human singer, even if endowed by a deity, include acquisition of narrative repertoire (*Od.* 1.337, 22.347–8), musical memory (*Il.* 2.600), and freedom to choose (or answer requests for) a particular song/theme (*Od.* 1.339, 347, 8.45).

My prime concern here, however, is not with the role of the Muses (whether taken literally, metaphorically, or in some delicate balance between those two semantic levels) in the psychological presuppositions of poetic creation and performance, but with their place in the Homeric repertoire of imagery for the claims and aspirations of song *vis-à-vis* its audiences. Whatever hypotheses may be constructed about their religio-cultural ancestry, the Muses are internalized in and inseparable from the workings of song (they *are* the essence of song, which came into existence with their ‘birth’⁴²) in a way which makes them different from the status of many other deities, though the connection between Eros or Aphrodite and human erotics is a partial parallel. Homeric discourse about the Muses calls in the first instance, therefore, for understanding in terms of the projected values and meanings of song as a realm of experience. It needs, moreover, to be interpreted sensitively (with an ear for the implicit as well as the explicit) as a discourse which is never without a poetic context (whether invocatory, narrative, or dramatic in form), rather than being extracted and codified into quasi-documentary evidence for an independent structure of beliefs.⁴³

We can start to apply and refine these principles of interpretation by turning to the start of the *Iliad*, a passage whose sheer familiarity may blunt our perception of what is most remarkable about it.

Μῆνιν ἄειδε, θεά, Πηληϊάδεω Ἀχιλῆος
 οὐλομένην, ἣ μυρὶ Ἀχαιοῖς ἄλγε’ ἔθηκε,
 πολλὰς δ’ ἰφθίμους ψυχὰς Ἀΐδι προΐαψεν
 ἥρώων, αὐτοὺς δὲ ἐλώρια τεύχε κύνεσσιν
 οἰωνοῖσι τε πᾶσι, Διὸς δ’ ἐτελείετο βουλή. . . (Iliad 1.1–5)⁴⁴

Sing of the rage, goddess, of Achilles son of Peleus,
 The deadly rage which inflicted untold griefs on the Achaians
 And plunged many mighty souls down to Hades—
 Heroes’ souls—but turned their bodies into carrion for all the dogs
 And birds, while the will of Zeus was being fulfilled . . .

⁴² Cf. Pl. *Phdr.* 259b for a later statement of this idea.

⁴³ Wheeler (2002: 33) is typical of many in collapsing a series of passages (six out of seven belonging to character statements) into a proposition about the author: ‘Homer . . . consistently asserts the supernatural [cf. n. 39 above] character of bardic recitation’ (my emphasis). Similarly, Finkelberg 1990: 293, Granger 2007: 406–11, automatically equate invocations and other statements about singers with a system of fixed beliefs shared by poet and audience.

⁴⁴ For various details of these lines, and further literature, cf. Latacz *et al.* 2000–: i/2. 11–22, Redfield 1979.

This is the only one of seven Homeric invocations where a Muse is herself invited to 'sing'. Although the statistic *per se* should not be given undue weight (we are dealing with part of a spectrum of bardic openings),⁴⁵ the character of the speech act provides an especially instructive illustration of the need to grasp the figurative import and implications of the Muse(s) within the epics' (self-)imagery of song, whatever larger theses might be held about archaic religious mentalities. A literalist interpretation of the singer as 'mouthpiece' of the Muse founders, most obviously, on the fact that the narrative of the *Iliad* as a whole is presented from a human not a divine point of view.⁴⁶ Furthermore, the invitation to the Muse is itself a request for a song *conceived* by a human mind, not by a god's. The request is elaborated not only by the human voice's choice and specification of theme, but also by a cluster of emotionally charged judgements which disclose the immense gravity of that theme. Far from passively awaiting communication from the Muse, the narrator, we might say, *already knows* what matters most, both humanly and divinely, about the proposed subject; the story comes to his mind laden with life-and-death significance.⁴⁷ Why, then, does he desire a Muse to 'sing' it for him? The question carries urgency whether the Muse is understood 'religiously' or 'rhetorically' (or both at once). Either way, there seems to be a latent assumption that the singing of a Muse

⁴⁵ The main points on the spectrum are (i) inviting a Muse herself to sing, *Il.* 1.1, *Thebais* fr. 1 EGF, and e.g. *Hom. Hymn* 4.1, 9.1; (ii) joint singing by bard and Muse(s), *Epigoni* fr. 1 EGF; (iii) human song with a Muse's assistance or encouragement, including the Muse's 'telling' the content of a song to the bard (see n. 39 above); (iv) a bard's proclamation of his own singing (*Il. parv.* fr. 1 EGF, and e.g. *Hom. Hymn* 2.1, 6.1–2, 10.1). Various combinations/nuances are evidently possible: e.g. *Hes. Op.* 1–2 mixes (i) and (iii), *Hom. Hymn* 9.1/8 mixes (i) and (iv), while *Hes. Theog.* 1, 36 uses (iv) but with the Muses themselves as simultaneously theme and (implicit) inspiration (cf. 22–34, with *Hom. Hymn* 25 for the same combination). For additional linguistic analysis, see Calame 1995: 35–48.

⁴⁶ Cf. de Jong (1987: 46–9) for the main passages which establish this point, ignored by the attempt of Ledbetter (2003: 25) to argue that the poem ambiguously 'merges' the human and divine voices; Rabel (1987: 17, etc.) blurs the issue by speaking of the 'Muse(s)-narrator'.

⁴⁷ The start of the *Iliad*, like that of the *Odyssey*, contradicts the claim of Dodds (1951: 80) that the poet 'always asks the Muses what he is to say, never how he is to say it'. The heavily emotion-laden nature of both proems also falsifies the reductive claim of Maehler (1963: 19) that the singer's relation to the Muse is 'sober and intellectual', restricted to a need for 'information'; similarly, Puelma (1989: 73 n. 13).

would bring to bear on the story something that is not overtly stated in these opening lines themselves; and the question of what that might be is heightened by the *prima-facie* anomaly of inviting a voice of divine perfection to sing of such gruesome, horrific things in the first place.

Many versions of a Homeric poetics cannot fully cope, I think, with this anomaly, since neither the idea of a Muse as supplier of veridical 'information' nor the supposed goal of an audience's 'pure' pleasure (here grotesquely beside the point, at first sight) will alone or in combination unlock a solution to the question. Even if a Muse were required to transmit privileged knowledge of the will of Zeus (though in this respect too the narrator's voice seems already confident of the story), what kind of human need or desire is expressed by inviting her to sing of hateful emotion, mass slaughter, and the reduction of heroes' bodies to rotting carrion for dogs and birds? It is one thing to see here an anticipation of the *Iliadic* motif of 'the mutilation of the corpse'; it is also legitimate to say, as was done already in antiquity, that the opening of the *Iliad* signals the 'tragic' cast of the poem.⁴⁸ But such considerations do not resolve the inbuilt paradox of picturing a divine singer devoting her musical gifts to themes of violence, destruction, and decay. The *Iliadic* motif of the mutilation of heroes' corpses underlines, rather than removes, the enigma set by the poem's invocation. And the striking of a tragic note at the start of the poem befits the voice of the *human* observer, not the Muse herself: Homeric deities are capable (fitfully) of pitying human suffering, but it is only humans themselves who can truly see their own existence in a tragic light.

We have here, in a kind of programmatic microcosm, some of the most taxing problems to be confronted by any search for a Homeric poetics. The common view that Homeric invocations to Muses can be made to fit a single, neat template—the transmission of 'historical' truth or factual information from a divine to a human mind—rests on a narrow, naive, quasi-documentary extrapolation from the various claims which bards make upon the support or collaboration of a Muse. The role of guarantor of scrupulously factual veracity cannot provide a complete or universal explanation of a Muse's functions. Not least, such a role is insufficient to account for the most prominent Homeric invocations, those at the start of the two epics. The force of

⁴⁸ Griffin (1980: 118) notes the scholia's recognition of the 'tragic' thematics of the opening. Cf. Macleod 1983: 7–8. On mutilation, see Vernant 1991: 67–74.

these is larger than those other invocations which are tied to particular narrative details. Even invocations of this latter, localized kind (five of them in the *Iliad*, none at all in the *Odyssey*) call for more nuanced treatment than the literalism which sees in them strict requests for concrete data from Muse 'informants': these passages affirm a vivid authenticity for the narrative, but they do so with a gestural rhetoric (akin, for instance, to the narrator's self-prompting with questions) that is so markedly selective as to make the literalist hypothesis absurdly lop-sided.⁴⁹

But whatever the emphasis on the Muses' knowledge in those secondary invocations, the prelude to the *Iliad* (and the same is just as true of the *Odyssey*'s proem) has a broader function. It is delivered, as stressed above, from a human point of view which is itself familiar with the substance and shape of the story to be told, and conscious, above all, of its emotional weight of conflict, suffering, and death. The narrator's voice does not declare explicitly at the opening of either epic why he invites the participation of a Muse, but the effect is to idealize or elevate onto a higher plane the aim of doing justice to the contemplation of events whose human burden of meaning is accentuated by the narrator's own words. 'Information' cannot exhaust what is implicitly called for in these instances; even if it is assumed to be a necessary condition of the Muse's task, it can hardly be a sufficient condition. If a Muse is required to authenticate the story, such authentication needs to be at least as much a matter of emotional and ethical insight as of factual verification.⁵⁰ Taken in all its

⁴⁹ *Il.* 2.484–92, the fullest invocation, reflects the catalogue's density of personal and geographical detail; it also dwells on implicitly performative memory: see n. 39 above; cf. Havelock 1963: 191–2 n. 15. Bowie (1993: 13–14) rightly resists the tendency to make this passage definitive of the singer's entire relationship to the Muses, as in e.g. Maehler 1963: 18, Verdenius 1983: 25–7 (a jumble of claims). I do not understand why Graziosi (2002: 141–2) thinks 2.486 is uniquely 'devoted to the narrator'. For further details of this passage, cf. Latacz *et al.* (2000–: ii/2. 140–4), with the interesting approach of Heiden (2008: 129–34). The other invocations are at *Il.* 2.761, 11.218, 14.508, 16.112; cf. the self-prompting questions at *Il.* 1.8, 5.703–4, 11.299–300, 16.692–3: the latter need not be interpreted as implicitly addressed to Muses (cf. Σ^b 1.8–9, Σ^{bT} 11.299), though many scholars understand them that way. De Jong (1987: 45–53) offers an excellent analysis of invocations from a narratological perspective; cf. Minchin 2001: 161–80, but assuming belief in Muses as 'objective reality' (164 n. 8).

⁵⁰ An explicit 'ethics' of song is assumed by Agamemnon's ghost at *Od.* 24.196–202, contrasting songs celebrating Penelope's virtue with those condemning Clytemnestra's evils: this is often overlooked in generalizations about Homeric

dimensions, the Muse-sponsored memory and retelling of the past in epic is more a matter of retaining a sense of essential contact with events of permanent significance than an unquestioning belief in accurate reportage—a belief, after all, which could not easily have coexisted with awareness of multiple, rival versions of many stories.⁵¹ But might the Muse's function also involve a process of transformation, a way of converting the misery and chaos of human affairs, as signalled so starkly at the start of each poem, into objects suitable for that intense 'longing' or 'desire' (*ἔμπερος*) which marks a characteristic response to song in Homer?

We can pursue the significance of the Muses for a Homeric poetics a little further by considering two images of them in collective action as singers, one from each epic. The first is from the end of *Iliad* 1 (601–4), where the Muses sing, to the accompaniment of Apollo's lyre, at the day-long feast of the gods on Olympus, after Hephaestus' antics have diffused the tension between Zeus and Hera which threatened to mar their banquet. The Muses perform here as an expert choir, 'responding with their lovely voices' (*ἀμειβόμεναι ὅπῃ καλῇ*, 604) to Apollo's playing (and probably, by implication, his singing), and perhaps also engaging in antiphonal exchanges within the group. What they sing about, we are not told. Brief and seemingly simple, the image is actually the only one in the whole of Homer to capture divine song in a purely serene light, exhibiting it as an expression of the gods' absorption in the celebration of their own existence and something without which the needs of their minds (their *thumos*, 602: one might almost say their 'life-force') would not be wholly fulfilled.⁵²

poetics, e.g. Schadewaldt 1965: 83 (asserting the absence of any reference to the ethical significance of song in Homer); cf. n. 15 above.

⁵¹ The attempt of Detienne (1996: 39–52) to link poetic memory/truth to the poet's supposedly sacral authority (even 'omnipotence', 52!) in early Greek society, alongside the seer and the king, lacks firm historical foundations. For a radical critique of Detienne's construal of early Greek conceptions of 'truth' (i.e. *alētheia*), see Williams 2002: 272; cf. Pratt 1993: 3 n. 5, 18 n. 8, 31 n. 33, Hesk 2000: 149–50. On alternative versions of myths, cf. Ch. 1 n. 33.

⁵² In Pind. fr. 31 (Snell-Maehler) the Muses are brought into being to satisfy a divine request to *κατακοσμεῖν* Zeus's world-order in words and music, i.e. capture and highlight its beauty in the structure of song. On the Pindaric context see Pucci 1998: 31–4, but his argument is marred by the assumption that Zeus had 'created the world' *tout court*, and by the forced thesis that 'meaning' only comes into being *after* the Muses' song; cf. Snell 1953: 77–9. Of other uses of *katakosmein*, note esp. Pl. *Tim.* 47d (harmony/rhythm, gifts of the Muses, are capable of restoring the internal revolutions of the soul), cf. *Tim.* 88e; Aristides Quint. *Mus.* 1.1 (only music can *katakosmein* the

The other image of the Muses as choir is found in the last book of the *Odyssey*, where the ghost of Agamemnon recounts to Achilles how the goddesses, in their only Homeric appearance as a group of nine, performed a lament or dirge for the dead Achilles himself (24.60–2).⁵³ Here as in *Iliad* 1 the Muses are described as ‘responding with their lovely voices’, a response this time evidently connected to the requirements of a ritual lament. If we ask how the voices of the Muses relate to or interact with those of the Nereids, who are also pictured grieving over the body of Achilles (58–9), a distinction can be drawn between the two groups. It is not obvious, for one thing, whether the Muses are imagined as physically present in quite the same way as the Nereids (who are said to have emerged, with loud cries, from the sea: 47–9), rather than audible in a kind of echoing divine response from above, or perhaps even, on the model of *Iliad* 2.485, automatically at hand in virtue of a kind of *omnipresence*—an idea which should itself be understood not as a piece of standard ‘theology’ but as a way of projecting onto song an idealized capacity to interpret all aspects of reality.⁵⁴ More important, however, is the fact that while the Nereids are themselves explicitly grief-stricken (οἴκτρ’ ὀλοφυρόμεναι, ‘wailing pitifully’, 59), on account of their close kinship, through Thetis, with Achilles, the Muses are not said to suffer in this way. They are described as performing a lament, which they do

whole of life), cf. esp. *Mus.* 2.2. See further at 84–7 below, with nn. 97, 99, on *κατὰ κόσμον* at *Od.* 8.489.

⁵³ I leave aside the question whether this passage is interpolated: ‘late Homer’(!) (West 1966: 176) is good enough for my purposes. As regards the uniqueness of this reference to nine Muses, note (in addition to other considerations: Heubeck, *CHO* iii. 366–7) the blunt riposte to Aristarchus’ objection in Σ^{MV}*Od.* 24.1: ‘why shouldn’t it occur just once?’ (τί κωλύει ἅπαξι): the uniqueness of a textual detail is never *per se* problematic.

⁵⁴ Note the contradiction, at a *literal* level, between *omnipresence* and ‘dwelling on Olympus’ (484). Neither *omnipresence* nor *omniscience* (*Il.* 2.485: but Mader, *Lfgre* fasc. 15.263, denies this interpretation) is a general property of Olympian gods (Helios, *Il.* 3.277, is a different case); cf. Vernant 1980: 102–3, Burkert 1985: 183. Their joint predication of the Muses is something other than ‘orthodox’ theology: Kirk, *IC* i. 167, Lamberton 1986: 3 (omniscience ‘an integral part of Homeric theology’), de Jong 2001: 108, make the Homeric picture simpler than it is; *Od.* 4.379/468 represents a limited human viewpoint (cf. West, *CHO* i. 217). Stehle (1997: 209) thinks this conception of the Muses peculiar to the *Iliad* and absent from both the *Odyssey* and Hesiod; but cf. the Sirens at *Od.* 12.191 (with n. 111 below). Omniscience is ascribed to the Muses (together with Zeus and Mnemosyne), consciously *à la* Homer, at Pind. *Pae.* 6.54–7 (where the immediate context, 50, refers to past events on the divine plane itself).

for the sake and benefit of others. And while the sounds of the emerging Nereids had a viscerally terrifying quality which nearly made the Greeks abandon the funeral and flee to their ships (48–50), the voices of the Muses, even in lamentation, are indefeasibly beautiful.

Although the Muses are executants of divinely perfect song in both *Iliad* 1 and *Odyssey* 24, not only is the mood of their singing radically different in the two scenes, so too is their relationship to the occasion and context of each song. In *Iliad* 1, they are members of the community of gods within and for which they perform. But in *Odyssey* 24 their song is heard by humans and is, in part at least, for their solace. (It is also implicitly for the benefit of their divine relatives, the Nereids themselves.⁵⁵) Yet the implications of the two scenes can be taken to complement one another in what they intimate about the divine conditions of song. The Muses' lament honours Achilles and gives a kind of magnified outlet to the grief of the other Greeks. 'You would not have seen a single Argive free of tears,' Agamemnon tells Achilles in Hades, 'such were the feelings aroused by [each] Muse's piercingly intense voice':

ἐνθα κεν οὐ τιν' ἀδάκρυτόν γ' ἐνόησας
Ἀργείων· τοῖον γὰρ ὑπώρορε Μοῦσα λίγυια.⁵⁶

The image evokes the Muses' musical beauty in the service of human mourning: the beauty enhances both emotion and ritual. Despite some doubt about the precise syntax of ὑπώρορε in line 62, there is a clear correspondence between the welling up of tears and the plaintive surge of the singing. This is symbolically and poetically important. Homeric grief, like real grief, releases itself most spontaneously in formless, quasi-animal wails, shrieks, and groans.⁵⁷ Even where such sounds give way to more articulate expression of sorrow, with one individual 'leading the grief' of others and producing a

⁵⁵ The same was true in the *Aithiopis*: Proclus' summary refers to Thetis 'coming with the Muses and her sisters and mourning her son'; Davies 1988: 47. Note that the *Tabula Iliaca* refers to a single Muse in this context: Davies 1988: 46, T3.

⁵⁶ *Od.* 24.61–2, with Heubeck, *CHO* iii. 367, Stanford 1965: ii. 415, for interpretation of line 62. λιγύς and cognates are used in Homer of the sounds of singing, wailing, lyres, winds, birds, whiplash, and bow-strings; the common factor is a penetrating or piercing timbre.

⁵⁷ Formless, instinctive cries, groans, etc. of grief: e.g. *Il.* 18.29–37, 22.407–9, *Od.* 8.527, 24.317.

pattern of solo voice answered by the group—as with Thetis and the Nereids grieving over Patroclus in *Iliad* 18, Achilles and the Myrmidons doing the same in both books 18 and 23, or Hecabe and the other Trojan women mourning for Hector in *Iliad* 22 and 24—what we have remains a manifestation of ‘primitive’ grief and anguish on the part of those directly stricken by what has happened.⁵⁸

But there is a further stage of grieving, a stage at which the bodily impulses of sorrow can be channelled into formally organized song. The *Iliad* shows this happening on the Trojan side only after Priam has returned with the ransomed corpse of Hector. At that point, ‘singers who lead the lament’ (24.720–1) play a role comparable to, though on a more modest level than, that of the Muses in *Odyssey* 24. In both cases, the primary community of mourning is still integrally involved and an atmosphere of inconsolable bereavement is sustained. But the presence of dedicated performers (a trained group of some kind) activates a process whereby the possibilities of lamentation expand beyond the voices of the primary mourners and can begin to be expressively ‘objectified’ in song. The scenes of lamentation for Hector and Achilles suggest that such singing is only possible—or at any rate needs to be led and guided—by those who are not themselves fully overcome by the raw forces of grief, those who have the capacity to convert grief into song (including, in mythical terms, those metamorphosed into songbirds).⁵⁹ *Odyssey* 24.60–2 implies that the ideal performers of this task are divine singers, the Muses themselves, who in a Homeric setting can never be totally immersed in human sorrow but who, like all Greek deities (including Zeus himself), can sympathize with it or even experience it vicariously and are therefore able to express it in a way that would strike a human hearer, as Agamemnon explains, as *both* supremely emotional *and* piercingly beautiful.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ ‘Leading’, (ἐξ)άρχειν, the grief of others: *Il.* 18.51 (Thetis), 316, 23.17 (Achilles), 22.430, 24.747 (Hecabe), 24.723 (Andromache), 24.761 (Helen). The singers at *Il.* 24.721, as more ‘ceremonial’ performers (see my text), are leaders of *lamentation* (θρήνοι): on these protocols of grief and lamentation, cf. (slightly differently) Alexiou 2002: 11–13, 131–3, Richardson, *IC* vi. 349–52.

⁵⁹ For the idea of *beautiful* lamentation, see the (uncertain) myth of the daughter of Pandareos, metamorphosed into a nightingale, at *Od.* 19.518–23, with Rutherford 1992: 192–3; cf. *Hom. Hymn* 19.16–18 (the ‘honey-voiced song’ of the nightingale’s lament, θρήνον . . . μελίγερυν ἀοιδήν).

⁶⁰ Sappho 150 *PLF*, declaring (sc. raw) lamentation (*thrênos*) inappropriate for ‘servants of the Muses’, hints at (and perhaps enacts) song’s transformative function.

The participation of the Muses in the lament for Achilles in *Odyssey* 24 sheds an oblique but revealing light on their significance for the larger workings of Homeric epic. That participation can be aligned with what I have suggested is a Homeric sense of how responses to human suffering extend along a scale from the most instinctive cries of pain and loss, via ritualized but still 'subjectively' motivated lamentations (serving the immediate needs of the community of mourners), to the sublimation of grief into performances of song which become moments of plangent but beautiful feeling—and therefore possible objects of desire—in their own right. My contention is that something of this sense of what is ultimately conceived of as the divinely *transformative* power of song is present in the invocations at the start of both the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*: without such an intuition, it becomes unintelligible why a Muse (whether literal or symbolic) should be invited to sing or tell of human death and misery. What is expected of the Muse on these occasions must be more than detailed or accurate 'information'. If veracity is presupposed, it needs to be of a kind which can merge with the capacity of song to draw even sordid death and suffering, so keenly perceived by the voice of the human narrator (not a glimmer of 'glory', notice, in the proem of either epic), into a special realm of expressiveness.

Contrary to the tendency of a good deal of modern scholarship, no Homeric image of song implies that its function(s) can be *reduced* to that of 'factually' veridical utterance. Truth is always a means to the larger end of seeking meaning and value in human existence—a point enigmatically but forcefully borne out, as I shall later try to show, by Odysseus' reactions to Demodocus in *Odyssey* 8. The participation of the Muses in the lament for Achilles, but equally their 'singing' and/or validation of Homeric epic itself, represents a meeting between the divine conditions of song (which, as in the Olympian scene towards the end of *Iliad* 1, ideally belongs in a world of permanent though only intermittently perfect being⁶¹) and the human need for song to

In a much later poetic context, *Anth. Pal.* 7.8.5–8 (Antipater Sid.), the Muses themselves are so grief-stricken (over the death of Orpheus, son of Calliope: cf. Asclepiades Trag. *FGrH* 12 F6) that they can no longer sing, only wail or howl (like the animals of Theoc. 1.75) with sorrow: the death of a human paragon of song causes a temporary suspension even of divine song. In a more stylized conceit, *Anth. Pal.* 7.412 (Alcaeus Mess.) also makes the Muses weep (not sing) at the death of Pylades the citharist. For a possible link with the Linus song, cf. n. 72 below.

⁶¹ Even for Homeric gods, song, though permanently available, is only occasionally experienced: it is offset against a background of divine feuding.

transform the pain and impermanence of life into a consoling experience of beautifully formed emotion. This is also a point of intersection between the idea of the Muses and the motif, discussed earlier, of the quasi-erotic human yearning or craving (*ἔμπερος*) for song.⁶² The Muses represent perfection of song; only they, accordingly, can be imagined as enabling a perfect fulfilment of the yearning which song arouses in its hearers. The epic narrator therefore regards the achievement of the finest song as possible only with the Muses' participation. Whether we think in terms of religious conviction or of a vivid trope of bardic self-promotion (as in the epithet *θεῖος*, 'god-like', bestowed on several singers in the two epics),⁶³ something more is at stake here than high technical excellence. There is an aspiration to a kind of song that, temporarily at least, can inhabit the plane of the divine, transmuting even the extremes of human unhappiness into an experience of intense beauty worthy of immortal minds.⁶⁴

This aspiration on the part of the epic narrator stands in a complex relationship, however, to the two poems' collective repertoire of images of song. It is worth considering at this juncture two of those images which stand far apart in the *Iliad* but are thematically connected. Both are called 'paeans', the only two Homeric occurrences of the term *παιήων* as the name of a song type (as opposed to the title of a healer-god, as at *Iliad* 5.401, 899–900).⁶⁵ The first paean, performed for Apollo by the beautiful voices of a band of young Greeks in book 1, after the god has answered Chryses' prayers and lifted the plague from the army, is a synthesis of worship and celebration of a characteristically Greek kind: it forms part of a ritual sequence that includes prayers, sacrifice, and a ceremonial feast. The second is sung by the army as a whole in book 22, on the instructions of Achilles, after the latter has killed Hector and started to turn his thoughts to

⁶² Even sobbing etc. in grief can fulfil a kind of desire; cf. the motif of *ἔμπερος γόοιο*, 'longing for grief', with n. 18 above: grief is here intuitively understood not as a mere outlet but a meaningfully intense expression of (nonetheless painful) feeling.

⁶³ Phemius (*Od.* 1.336, 16.252 etc.), Demodocus (8.43, 47 etc.), Menelaus' bard (4.17); cf. *Il.* 18.604, possibly spurious: see West 2001: 250–2, Edwards, *IC* v. 230–1 for various views.

⁶⁴ One should resist the temptation, however, to ascribe an abstract metaphysical perspective to the Muses. Pucci 1998: 33–4 links the Muses' 'truth' to 'the world of Being' [*sic*]; cf. 'the *things themselves* in their totality' (36, his emphasis), 'the absolute truth' (*ibid.*): this (almost Parmenidean) idiom is alien to Homeric imagination and sensibility.

⁶⁵ On the history of the paean, cf. Rutherford 2001: 3–136, Ford 2006.

the funeral of Patroclus. In the first case, the function of song belongs within a setting whose whole rationale is to mark a transition from the experience of (meaningless, uncontrollable) death into a reaffirmation of communal life, albeit a life organized around the deadly purposes of war. The singing of the paean, here clearly enough a hymn to Apollo in his role as god of healing,⁶⁶ is not an incidental, decorative addition to the framework of ritual and ceremonial action. That it continues 'all day long' (1.472) marks its importance both for the community that performs it and for the god imagined as listening to it. The song seems to accompany, in particular, the symposium-like ritual drinking which follows the sacrificial meal in which Chryses, Odysseus, and the small group of young Greeks sent to return Chryseis to her father have participated.⁶⁷ Psychologically and symbolically, the paean is part of the passage from suffering to renewal; it simultaneously serves as an offering of 'appeasement' to the god, alongside the hecatomb sacrifice itself, and as an expression of relief and revitalization, alongside the drinking of wine. But in addition to both those points—crowning them, as it were—the description of the paean draws attention to the musical beauty of the singing and to the consequently deep pleasure which the god himself takes in it (473–4). Apollo's receptivity to the performance (which may be understood to involve dance as well as singing, given the terms *μολπή* and *μέλπειν*, 472/4) is more than an index of the causal efficacy of the ritual, important though that is. As with the Muses, with whom Apollo has closer relations than any other Olympian, it is a sign of the divine credentials of song itself: its capacity to communicate between humans and gods, and its impetus towards imposing a quasi-divine order and beauty on what was previously a chaos of death and disorder.⁶⁸

That is not, however, the whole story. Precisely because book 1's paean has a social context, it is shadowed by the quarrel that preceded it. Unlike the plague itself, the quarrel has not ended. The episode of

⁶⁶ It would be pedantic to say that the singers themselves cannot yet know that the plague has been lifted. The description of Apollo's response to Chryses' prayer (1.457) colours how we hear everything that follows.

⁶⁷ For a paean sung at the start of a symposium, see e.g. Xen. *Symp.* 2.1; cf. Philoch. *FGrH* 328 F216 (Sparta).

⁶⁸ The power of a paean to transcend raw grief is later given a paradoxical twist at Callim. *Hymn Ap.* 20–4, where even Thetis and Niobe suspend their mourning for Apollo's own victims during the performance of the song.

Chryseis' return to her father to which the paean belongs is emphatically enclosed by descriptions of Achilles' withdrawal and brooding anger.⁶⁹ This lends the performance of the paean, together with the whole hecatomb, a sort of dramatic irony. The Greeks have appeased the god Apollo but they have not yet started to appease Achilles. The plague has stopped killing Greeks, but Achilles' anger, via his mother's supplication of Zeus, is about to cause the deaths of more of them. What appears, therefore, from one angle as the successful functioning of song within a social and religious framework is undercut by a strongly marked tension with the larger narrative; and this point is heightened if we think of a paean as a prayer for future protection as well as thanksgiving for escape from recent sufferings. Both the 'generic' status and the performative context of the paean are implicitly destabilized by the background of disruptive forces unleashed by Achilles. And this ominous state of affairs places a limitation on the 'divine' aspirations of the song itself.

Something comparable though differently nuanced is true of the second Iliadic paean, whose circumstances are in some respects a reverse image of the first. The later song occurs in the immediate aftermath of the climactic success of Achilles' return to battle, at the moment when the Greeks crowd round Hector's corpse and stab their spears into it. Achilles himself is caught between conflicting impulses. He suggests following up the killing of Hector with an attempt to press home the military advantage and discover whether the Trojans are now prepared to abandon resistance to the siege (22.378–84). But he then abruptly returns to his grief for the unburied Patroclus, and it is at this point that he instructs the army to sing a paean while the body of Hector is taken back to the Greek ships. The *prima-facie* implication is that the paean should act as a processional victory song.⁷⁰ But the circumstances—including the foregrounding of two unburied figures, Patroclus and Hector—make the meaning of song in this context inherently problematic. What's more, Achilles'

⁶⁹ 1.428–30, 488–92.

⁷⁰ For the interesting view that ll. 393–4 are themselves the 'improvised' words of the paean, see Eustathius *ad loc.* (iv. 636 van der Valk); cf. Schadewaldt 1965: 62, Lohmann 1970: 21, Richardson, *IC* vi. 146. But there is no obvious prompt to understand the lines that way. Σ^{bT} on 391 preserve a view that the paean is a kind of *thrênos* (for Patroclus): a difficult position (cf. Rutherford 2001: 87), but understandable in the light of Achilles' conflicting feelings in this passage; cf. n. 71 below. Pulleyn (2000: 242) strangely describes book 22's paean as 'a prelude to battle'.

instructions are directly followed by one of the most notorious passages in the entire epic, the description of the 'outrageous deeds' (ἀεικέα . . . ἔργα, 395) Achilles perpetrates on Hector's corpse by tying it to his chariot and dragging his 'beautiful head' across the dusty plain. It is hardly surprising that here, unlike book 1, we are given no account of divine reaction to the paean. Everything about the setting makes it impossible to imagine a positive response from Apollo, whose forlorn attempt to help Hector was described earlier in the book and whose part in Achilles' own impending death was voiced by Hector with his final breath (359).

The paean ordered by Achilles becomes inextricable from his own confused emotions. It turns into the accompaniment to a proleptic celebration of victory by the Greeks and to a journey back to the place where Patroclus' funeral will take place. But it is also the prelude to a mutilation of Hector's corpse so hideous that the gods themselves, led by Apollo, will be revolted by it. If we think of Apollo as both the typical (though not necessarily the only) divine recipient of a paean, as well as, alongside the Muses, the supreme symbol of the divine expressiveness of music, then we are left with a sense that book 22's paean is not only contextually ambiguous but disturbingly perverse in its attempt to impose the consoling, restorative beauty of song onto events of disfiguring violence.⁷¹ In book 1, the paean made ostensible sense in its circumstances but was performed in the shadow of a new, looming menace. In book 22, the paean is part of Achilles' attempt to come to terms with the only partially resolved tensions of his personal crisis, but its conjunction with his own extreme actions makes it border on the grotesque. It is a performance whose emotional significance and contextual function are left hanging in paradoxical suspense by the Homeric narrative, not least because of the implicit

⁷¹ Richardson, *IC* vi. 146, is strictly right to say that there is no 'compelling reason' to take book 22's paean as addressed to Apollo; but the context implicitly sets the paean in a darkly ironic *relationship* to Apollo. Taplin (1992: 247–8 n. 75) conjectures that *Il.* 22.367–94 might be an interpolation; he thinks 395 ff. a non-sequitur after the reference to a paean (though note that 392 need not mean 'carrying' the corpse). But it is as easy, and more rewarding, to make sense of the sequence in terms of the conflicted, volatile character of Achilles; cf. Lohmann 1970: 20–2 with n. 25, West 2003b: 8, for other views. Σ^{b1}*Il.* 22.391 takes the paean, qua lament (n. 70 above), to illustrate a quasi-Pythagorean musical catharsis (i.e. therapy for the emotional turmoil of Achilles?).

failure of song in this situation to establish communication between the worlds of humans and gods.

Although the *Iliad*'s two paeans stand out because of their association with the extraordinary and always troubling figure of Achilles, they also represent a larger feature of Homeric depictions of human song. There is not, in fact, a single depiction of such song in either the *Iliad* or *Odyssey* which is not in some way shadowed, within the epic narrative itself, by hints of incompleteness, uncertainty, or contingency. Even the four cases of socially integrated and harmoniously functional singing (and/or music) on the shield of Achilles (itself a divinely beautiful artefact, whether or not we regard it as a kind of metaphor for Homeric poetry itself) are all tinged with intimations of what human song can only aspire to achieve but never fully accomplish. The image of exhilarated wedding hymns-cum-dances (18.491–6) is starkly juxtaposed with a murder trial in the agora of the same city (497). The two herdsmen 'taking deep pleasure in their pan-pipes' (τερπόμενοι σύριγξι, 526) are caught up in a state of mind which blinds them to the ambush about to destroy them. The lovely song performed for the vintage harvesters by a young boy, to the accompaniment of a *phorminx*, is apparently a song about the death of Linus (569–72), a death which, in one version at any rate, is actually caused by the attempt of a human singer to compete with the gods. And, finally, even the gleaming beauty of the formally choreographed dance involving young unmarried men and women, accompanied by a lyre-playing bard and watched by entranced spectators (590–606), is made to evoke the kind of spectacle in which young Ariadne once took part at Cnossos, thereby bringing with it ambiguous suggestions of the unhappiness to which the music of such pre-nuptial performances might ultimately lead.⁷² Each of these images

⁷² Edwards, *IC* v. 213 sees both scenes at 18.490–508 as reflecting 'ordered communal life', but that hardly erases their sharply contrasting moods. For another ironically viewed wedding song, see Hera's reminiscence at *Il.* 24.62–3, with Pl. *Resp.* 2.383a–b (citing Aesch. fr. 350) for a further perspective on the same event. Cf. Rutherford 2001: 124–5. For various views on the 'Linus song', see Edwards, *IC* v. 225, Barker 1984: 23 n. 12. The Muses themselves lamented one figure named Linus (Σ *Il.* 18.570 = *PMG* 880), in some versions a son, like Orpheus, of Apollo and Calliope (cf. n. 60 above); Asclepiades Trag. *FGrH* 12 F6. With the Ariadne reference at 18.591–2, cf. the case of Perimele, *Il.* 16.179–86, seen dancing by Hermes, who then secretly fathers a child on her (by rape?). On ways of reading the imagery of the shield as a whole, cf. Taplin (1980).

on the shield has its own resonance and overtones, but they all contribute to a larger Homeric pattern by depicting human singing (and its 'sister arts' of music and dance) as falling short of the divine paradigm of perfection which forms the implicit object of the yearning desire (*ἔμπερος*) stimulated by song.

Where Achilles is concerned, the *Iliad* goes further than highlighting his special influence on the paeans of the Greek army at Troy. It makes Achilles himself a singer, and by doing so produces the most symbolically condensed and puzzling of all Homeric depictions of song. The scene in question is famous, but its interpretation remains profoundly obscure. The embassy sent by Agamemnon to Achilles in *Iliad* 9 finds the hero in his tent not only accompanying his own singing on the lyre but singing *to* and for himself, despite the presence of Patroclus. The narrative takes pains to emphasize the peculiar circumstances.

τὸν δ' εὖρον φρένα τερπόμενον φόρμιγγι λιγείῃ
καλῇ δαιδαλέῃ, ἐπὶ δ' ἀργύρεον ζυγὸν ἦεν,
τὴν ἄρετ' ἐξ ἐνάρων πόλιν Ἡετίωνος ὀλέσσας·
τῇ ὃ γε θυμὸν ἔτερπεν, αἶειδε δ' ἄρα κλέα ἀνδρῶν.
Πάτροκλος δέ οἱ οἶος ἐναντίος ἦστο σιωπῇ,
δέγμενος Αἰακίδαην ὁπότε λήξειεν αἰείδων. (*Iliad* 9.186–91)

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They found him taking heartfelt pleasure in a clear-voiced lyre,
A beautiful, exquisite instrument, with a bar made of silver,
A lyre he received from the spoils after destroying Eëtion's city.
With this he was giving his spirits deep pleasure, singing the renown of men.
Patroclus alone was present, sitting opposite him in silence, 190
Waiting for the grandson of Aeacus to cease from his singing.

After his explosive quarrel with Agamemnon in book 1, Achilles was left full of rage, brooding in isolation and 'self-wasting heartache' (*φθινύθεσκε φίλον κῆρ*), but also pining for the battlefield (1.488–92). No first-time hearer of the *Iliad* would readily anticipate that Achilles would be performing quasi-epic poetry to himself when the embassy reaches his tent in book 9. The symbolism of the moment strikes a dark, perplexing note. One commentator, imposing criteria of banal realism onto a context of heroic extremes, crudely suggests that 'Akhilleus' emotional turmoil... has given way to tedium': all the more misconceived a judgement given that, as this same scholar correctly adds, Achilles is singing 'of the heroic deeds that he is no

longer allowing himself to perform'.⁷³ Homer's poetry deserves a better response than this.

There is a significant relationship between everything said of Achilles' overwrought state of mind in book 1 (a state of mind which will soon resurface in his vehement responses to the envoys' message from Agamemnon) and the counterintuitive representation of him as a singer of heroic song in book 9. Achilles sings in isolation, almost solipsistically so: as though the world of epic were not outside his tent but only inside his head. It is important to the creation of this impression that the description of Patroclus 'waiting' for Achilles to finish makes him a kind of contingent presence, not an engaged audience of the song; and even if we read this detail differently, it scarcely diminishes the seclusion of the performance, since Patroclus is a sort of alter ego to Achilles.⁷⁴ Singing to oneself, admittedly, is not an intrinsically unhomeric act; Circe and Calypso both sing to accompany their work (and in the *Homeric Hymns* both Pan and Anchises play music to themselves in the countryside in proto-pastoral fashion⁷⁵). But the present context is exceptional. It is an alternative to, and displacement of, involvement in the war itself, an alternative given ironic colouring by close focus on the beautiful lyre which Achilles acquired as a piece of war-booty.

This instrument, an 'objective correlative' if ever there was one, is a richly double-sided icon: lavishly, preciously ornate, a product of the finest civilized craftsmanship, yet in Achilles' possession as a result of the wholesale destruction of a city. It bespeaks Achilles' military prowess in winning it, but also his strange predicament in having recourse to it amid a crisis of alienation. Elsewhere in the *Iliad*, a specific and even sarcastic contrast is sometimes drawn—though always by characters, never the narrator—between the worlds of warfare and of music, and between the supposedly different kinds of men (heroic warriors versus soft idlers) who show talents for each of these activities: if we believe the

⁷³ Hainsworth, *IC* iii. 88; compare the equally regrettable reference to 'ennui' in Fränkel 1975: 10. Amidst several misplaced suggestions recorded in the scholia, Σ^{bT} 9.186 more appropriately discern 'solace for his anger and anguish' (παραμυθία γὰρ τοῦτο θυμοῦ καὶ λύπης). On Achilles' song as a marker of being outside the heroic arena, cf. Murnaghan 1987: 150. Vernant (1991: 58–9) smooths out the paradoxes of the context.

⁷⁴ Fränkel 1975: 10, Hainsworth, *IC* iii. 88 *ad* 189 (but contrast his note on 186–7, Achilles 'solitary even in his recreation') take Patroclus to be waiting to take up the song himself, an inference ll. 191 hardly encourages. Against this, cf. Segal (1994: 114–15, though the middle voice in *τερπόμενον* is irrelevant to the point).

⁷⁵ *Hom. Hymn* 5.80 (lyre, with singing implied?), 19.14–16 (pan-pipes).

scornful Hector, for instance, a musical instrument befits the lifestyle of an inferior fighter like Paris.⁷⁶ Achilles the lyre-player appears to confound such a dichotomy and the scheme of values it relies on. But his representation as both instrumentalist and singer—a singer, what's more, of implicitly warlike deeds from 'epic' song—underlines the near-contradictory nature of the present situation. At the heart of the *Iliad* itself, Achilles' own song is like a clouded mirror in which he looks for his own reflection.

The closer we consider this special Iliadic moment, the more paradoxical it seems. It would be a mistake to infer from the double reference to Achilles' pleasure that his singing is a merely agreeable pastime, a light distraction or relaxation: as I stressed earlier, the verb *τέρπεισθαι* is associated in Homer with a sense of strong, quasi-physical, or, perhaps better, 'psychosomatic' gratification. But Achilles is singing in a state of unassuageable anger with Agamemnon, an anger which will shortly lead him to contemplate even abandoning the expedition altogether and relinquishing the life of a warrior-hero. Why, then, should he take pleasure of *any* kind in song? The difficulty of this question is increased by uncertainties attaching to the subject of his song, *κλέα ἀνδρῶν*, 'the renown/reputations of men'. Which reputations, and which men, we are, crucially, not told. It is often assumed, even so, that the phrase not only self-reflexively evokes the traditions of epic to which the *Iliad* itself belongs but represents them as unequivocally predicated on the celebration of heroic glory. This, however, is too simple.

Kleos, both as the general circulation of oral tradition and as a source for epic songs, is undoubtedly the medium in which heroic reputations are perpetuated; it is often presented as the only currency in which heroes can win a posthumous reward for prowess and achievement. But not everything that falls into the realm of *kleos* is positive, whether in its claims to be authoritative (and the invocation to the Muses before the catalogue in *Iliad* 2 pointedly contrasts *κλέος* with knowledge) or in the light which it throws on the past.⁷⁷ As it happens, the phrase *κλέα ἀνδρῶν* used to denote the theme of

⁷⁶ *Il.* 3.54; see n. 25 above for further references to this motif.

⁷⁷ *Kleos* versus Muses' knowledge: *Il.* 2.486. In Hesiod, the Muses themselves can disseminate *kleos*: see the verb *κλείειν* at *Theog.* 44, 105, *Op.* 1, all referring primarily to divine subject matter; cf. *Theog.* 32 (Hesiod's song), 100 (*κλεία προτέρων ἀνδρῶν*). But that does not give human *kleos* as such a guaranteed grounding in truth; cf. Ch. 1, 22–3. For various treatments of Homeric *kleos*, see Griffin 1980: 95–102, Goldhill 1991: 69–108, Redfield 1994: 30–9, Olson 1995: 1–23, Pucci 1998: 36–42, Finkelberg

Achilles' song occurs in only one other place in the *Iliad*: it is found later in the embassy scene itself, where Phoenix uses it to introduce the cautionary tale of Meleager's anger ('we have heard the reputations of past heroes too, when vehement anger took hold of one of them', 524–5). However we construe the rather tortuous version of Meleager's story which Phoenix goes on to relate, it certainly cannot be equated with a paradigm of unqualified 'glory' or brilliant success. There are at least traces of a comparable instability in the implications of the phrase κλέα ἀνδρῶν in its only Odyssean occurrence as well, where it is used to introduce Demodocus' first song at 8.73, the song of a kind of para-Iliadic quarrel between Achilles and Odysseus (with exchanges of 'appalling words', ἐκπάγλοις ἐπέεσσιν) in the prelude to the Trojan war, and a song which reduces the listening Odysseus to tears and sobbing—a reaction as far removed as could be, it would seem, from anything like pride in the 'glory' of his renown.⁷⁸

Furthermore, even if the fame carried by *kleos* is thought of as a sort of immortality, as in the phrase κλέος ἄφθιτον, 'undying renown', used by Achilles at *Iliad* 9.413 to refer to his future reputation if he stays and fights at Troy, it is necessarily a surrogate immortality, linked inescapably to the actual death of the person, as the passage just cited makes poignantly clear: 'undying renown' belongs with one of the two fated routes which Achilles is only too gravely aware that he must take to his death (9.411).⁷⁹ While *kleos* can in principle be thought of as a great prize to be won, its compensation for human finiteness is always implicitly a reminder of the latter. To say that a person's '*kleos* will never perish' (κλέος οὐποτ' ὀλεῖται) is to stand in the shadow and pathos of a recognition that the person most certainly *will* die: 'for death and immortality', as Milan Kundera puts it, 'are an indissoluble pair of lovers'.⁸⁰ Indeed, it is darkly ironic that the only

1998: 74–9, Scodel 2002: 69–73. It is unwarranted to say, with Nagy 1989: 12, that in Homer '*kleos* denotes the act of praising'.

⁷⁸ Odysseus has no difficulty at *Od.* 9.12–20 in juxtaposing a view of his life-story as one of 'woes' (n. 107 below) with a claim that his *kleos* is universal. For Demodocus' first song and Odysseus' reaction to it, see further at 79–82 below.

⁷⁹ For debate about the phrase κλέος ἄφθιτον, including putative Indo-European parallels, see Volk (2002), West (2007: 406–10), Finkelberg (2007).

⁸⁰ Kundera 1991: 55. At *Il.* 2.325 κλέος οὐποτ' ὀλεῖται refers to a whole episode, the omen of the snake and sparrow at Aulis (prefiguring the ten-year war at Troy), which mixes both suffering and perpetual renown; at *Il.* 7.91 the phrase is associated with the complicated idea that one person's funeral monument will also preserve *another's* (Hector's) renown; at *Od.* 24.196 it is directly equivalent to the traditions of song itself.

place in Homer where 'undying renown' is named in that resounding phrase itself is at the very point where Achilles' bitter disillusionment with the heroism of war reaches its acme: he names it at the moment where, in his own mind, he sees it as *inadequate* compensation for the sheer finality of death itself. And this is the same hero whom the envoys find singing of the *kleos* of others.

Whatever we make, then, of the wider implications of *kleos* and its variants in Homer, Achilles' song in book 9 cannot be easily interpreted as expressing unproblematic attachment to an ideal of pure heroic glory affirmed in song. On the contrary, if we take full account of the highly charged context—the overhanging backdrop of the quarrel and wrath, with their consequences for the course of the war; the quasi-solipsistic isolation of the act of singing itself; the double-sided symbolism of the lyre; and the profound disillusionment, as well as 'heart-grieving outrage' (*θυμαλγέα λώβην*, 9.387),⁸¹ which erupts from Achilles soon afterwards in his dialogue with the envoys (and was prefigured in book 1)—the song is best treated as symbolizing Achilles' inherently knotted, self-consuming relationship to the heroic arena from which he has withdrawn in a tempestuous rage. He finds a vicarious satisfaction in pondering that arena at one remove, through the reputations of others who have lived lives in some sense like his own. His song is, as it were, about a heroic 'parallel universe'.

The implication which aligns this moment with other Homeric images of singers and their audiences is that song offers a hope of redeeming the imperfections, even the tragedy, of human existence. It does so by endowing the events of time-bound mortality with an intensely felt significance which transmutes disorder into order, pain into beauty. Unlike the unhappy, self-incriminating Helen of *Iliad* 6.357–8, who can imagine this happening with her own life-story only in the future, Achilles creates for himself (with the lyre which is itself an exquisitely ambivalent testimony to his heroic stature) a degree of psychic compensation for his quarrel with Agamemnon and his wrenching separation from the world that gives him his identity. Temporarily at any rate, song enables him to overlay his violent emotions and their destructive consequences with emotional

On the varying tone of Homeric characters' anticipations of songs about themselves, cf. de Jong 2001: 219–20.

⁸¹ Tr. from Hainsworth, *IC* iii. 114, a shrewd note.

satisfaction in the lasting value not of stories about himself but stories he can recognize as like his own.

Yet within the larger meanings of the *Iliad* itself, Achilles' song remains inaccessibly private (even, in a sense, to Patroclus). Homer's audience can no more share the hero's song than they can share that of the Muses on Olympus in book 1. It is fitting, moreover, that we are not told that Achilles' song was inspired by a Muse, nor whether he discovers in it anything that could count as 'truth': *kleos* as such, we have seen, is a process of human culture and tradition, existing independently of divine knowledge, however much it may wish to be infused by the latter. We can say only that Achilles tries to satisfy his soul with song when all the other satisfactions he craves are denied to him. Because song represents one kind of human aspiration to the divine, Achilles can be understood to be seeking a surrogate for the 'immortal' reputation he might win on the battlefield. But the terseness of the passage leaves this moment in the hero's story necessarily uncertain, its meaning incomplete.

ODYSSEUS' TEARS AND THE PARADOXICAL NEED FOR SONG

If the significance of Achilles' singing in *Iliad* 9 forms a demanding test-case for any approach to a Homeric 'poetics', that is partly in virtue of the compressed, elliptical narrative moment in which it is contained. Equally taxing (and ultimately related) issues of interpretation are raised, however, by the extended scene at Phaeacia in book 8 of the *Odyssey* in the course of which the blind bard Demodocus sings a trio of songs for the Phaeacians and their special guest, the as yet unidentified Odysseus. This much-discussed sequence of events is one of the most intricately conceived and thematically subtle episodes to be found anywhere in Homer. It raises many more issues than can be dealt with here; among those I shall leave on one side is the status of Demodocus' second song, the (perhaps) 'burlesque' account of the adultery of Ares and Aphrodite.⁸² My major concern

⁸² Cf. n. 10 above, with Rinon 2008: 114–26 for a reading of the whole triad of songs. An earlier version of the present section appeared online as Halliwell (2009b).

here will centre on the conspicuously contrasting reactions of Odysseus and the Phaeacian nobles to the first and third of Demodocus' songs, i.e. the two songs in which Odysseus himself is a character: the first about a quarrel with Achilles in the build-up to the Trojan war, the other about the stratagem of the Wooden Horse which eventually wins that war for the Greeks. While the Phaeacians are described as engrossed with pleasure in these songs, and therefore as eager for more (8.90–1; cf. 538), Odysseus covers his head and weeps—not unlike the way, we might recall, in which Telemachus covers his eyes and weeps for his father at the palace of Menelaus in book 4.⁸³ On both occasions, Alcinous, sitting next to Odysseus and alone of the Phaeacians aware of his reaction, calls for the songs to be terminated, tactfully masking the guest's reaction the first time round (8.97–9) but later announcing it openly (8.536–41).

The contrast in question is open to more than one interpretation. Do the Phaeacians represent a model audience of epic song, able, unlike Odysseus, to take 'pure' pleasure in stories which are not about their own lives? Or are they, in their lack of enemies (6.200–3), *too* comfortably protected from the world of war and its terrible upheavals to be able to appreciate the full weight of the songs' significance? Is there any way in which an 'ideal' audience could possibly combine elements of both the Phaeacians' *and* Odysseus' responses?⁸⁴ The episode does not make it easy or, I think, advisable to construct a normative poetics of epic audiences: it suggests, if anything, that epic does not stand in a preconceived, static relationship to fixed audience types, but can create (and/or find) different audiences in the contingent circumstances of performance. Part of the difficulty we face in trying to make full sense of the contrast between audiences in *Odyssey* 8 is that the Homeric narrative provides only an 'external' glimpse of the Phaeacians' experience. We see them only from the outside as a collectively enthralled audience and are not given any insight into what the songs might mean to them; in that, though not in every, respect, there is a parallelism with the suitors' response to Phemius' song in book 1.⁸⁵ Furthermore, the pleasure which marks

⁸³ *Od.* 4.113–16; cf. n. 13 above. Telemachus' position there matches that of Odysseus when hearing Demodocus' first (but not his third, requested) song: he is overwhelmed by Menelaus' first, heartfelt reference to Odysseus' exceptional qualities and sufferings. Cf. Cairns 2009: 38–9.

⁸⁴ See e.g. the views of Macleod 1983: 9, Cairns 2001*b*: 26–7, Walsh 1984: 3–6, 16–20; on the latter cf. n. 33 above, with the criticism of de Jong 1986: 422.

⁸⁵ See n. 11 above.

their response, as denoted by the verb *τέρπessθαι*, need not be a matter of 'pure' or 'simple' enjoyment. Several Homeric passages demonstrate this: they include, as we have seen, the application of the same verb to Telemachus' intense and certainly not emotion-free absorption in Menelaus' Trojan and post-Trojan narratives (*Od.* 4.598), to Eumaeus' description of the gratification which he and his visitor might find in listening to each other's recollections of the 'grievous woes' they have lived through (*Od.* 15.399), and (however opaquely) to Achilles' performance of his 'private' epic at *Iliad* 9.189. We are not allowed any direct access to the feelings that befit a Phaeacian audience of songs about a world so different from their own; but we should not draw the erroneous supposition that their response is depicted as necessarily free of emotional engagement. More importantly, however, the Phaeacians serve principally as background and foil to the extraordinary response of Odysseus himself, and it is his response which poses a far larger problem of interpretation: indeed, a fundamental enigma.

The core of this enigma can be stated in the form of a question, and one which has received surprisingly little attention from critics.⁸⁶ How, in the light of what leads up to it (not least, Alcinous' decision to interrupt proceedings at 96–9—a decision which is itself an *interpretation* of his guest's feelings), are we to understand Odysseus' motive for actually requesting the third song? The first song, starting from his pre-war quarrel with Achilles (but perhaps expanding, so the combination of lines 90–2 with 489–90 suggests, into a narrative of parts of the war itself), comes as a kind of shock to Odysseus. Demodocus was summoned by Alcinous to contribute his divinely conferred gift of singing to the celebration of a feast in honour of the visitor. Odysseus (like hearers of the *Odyssey* itself) is in no position to anticipate the theme of the first song or to prepare himself for how it will suddenly throw a dramatic spotlight on his own life of twenty years ago: it is as though he is caught emotionally off guard. Yet when the feast is reconvened later in the day, after the athletic games outside the palace and Demodocus' song of Ares and Aphrodite's adultery, Odysseus (in effect *reversing* Alcinous' earlier act of interpretation) specifically requests the Phaeacian bard to sing the story of the Wooden Horse.

⁸⁶ Goldhill (1991: 51–4) poses the question directly and stresses its difficulty. Cf. Mattes 1958: 113–15 (with n. 108 below).

This pregnant moment presents an audience of the *Odyssey* with a psychologically acute challenge of interpretation. Odysseus lavishly praises (as the product of ‘teaching’ by a Muse or Apollo) Demodocus’ ability to sing of events in a manner which has both structured beauty (*kosmos*: see below) and an authenticity redolent of eyewitness testimony (8.491), the latter a detail not without poetic irony in view of (Odysseus’ knowledge of) the bard’s blindness. But given the tears, sobbing, and sense of social embarrassment (the veiling of the head) which marked his response to Demodocus’ first song, why should Odysseus want to hear another narrative about himself at all, a narrative which, as it turns out, will induce in him precisely the same upsurge of turbulent emotion as before? Since he has no need for its own sake to ‘test’ the powers of the Phaeacian bard, what is it about the experience of song which lures him into betraying such strong feelings in the presence of strangers? Unless we are content to follow the scholia on 8.43 in their critically back-to-front explanation—that Odysseus’ tears are needed to cause Alcinous’ question about his identity (8.577–86)⁸⁷—the problem calls for careful consideration.

The puzzle is only compounded by assuming, with many critics, that Demodocus’ first song reduces Odysseus to a state comparable to the distress of Penelope in book 1 when she (over)hears Phemius’ song of the disasters that befell many Greeks on their return voyage from Troy. The differences between the two scenes are actually more telling than the prima-facie resemblances. In Penelope’s case, the song is not explicitly about her own plight, at any rate if we exclude the hypothesis, held by some scholars, that we are meant to infer that the song tells of the ‘death’ of Odysseus himself.⁸⁸ But as she listens and reflects (*φρεσὶ σύνθετο*, 1.328: Penelope is an active *interpreter* of what she hears, not a passive recipient), Phemius’ song induces her to feel (and imagine) that it is about her own life. Ignorant of Odysseus’ survival and Athena’s positive role in it, she

⁸⁷ Σ^QOd. 8.43: ‘the poet designed the whole scene brilliantly so that when Demodocus sings Odysseus’ tears can provide Alcinous . . . with a cue to ask him who he is’. Arist. *Poet.* 16.1455a2–4 (cf. n. 93 below) sees Odysseus’ recognition as following from his tears, but he does not make the scholia’s mistake of thinking that this poetically ‘explains’ the tears. Roisman (1990: 223–4) strangely suggests that Odysseus cries *in order* to be asked his identity. For the possibility of an allusive reworking of the Phaeacian moment in Callim. *Epigr.* 43 Pfeiffer (*AP* 12.134), see Bing 2009: 166–9.

⁸⁸ For this hypothesis, cf. n. 11 above.

cannot dissociate her unhappiness from the thought of the terrible deaths inflicted by Athena on some of the returning Greeks.⁸⁹ Penelope's reaction, therefore, mixes emotional authenticity with (understandable) cognitive error, and it is this mixture which makes the experience unbearable for her—hence her decision to descend into the hall and her tearful insistence that Phemius stop the song.

In book 8, by contrast, Odysseus knows for himself the relationship of Demodocus' first song to his own life, so that his sobbing grief (γοάσκειν, 8.92) ought, unlike Penelope's, to be aligned with his understanding of what the song reveals about his past (and his present) situation. Here, however, the *Odyssey* itself partly occludes the vision of its own audience. We are not informed what it is that Odysseus feels grief for: the bitter quarrel with Achilles (including its exchanges of 'appalling words', ἐκπάγλοις ἐπέεσσιν, 8.77)? or the deaths of his former comrades? or the whole 'woe' (πῆμα, 81) of the war? or the particular consequences of the war for his own separation from home and family?⁹⁰ Whatever meaning might be projected onto his emotions, or onto the symbolism of his repeated libations (8.89, the only libations in Homer where we are not told, or cannot easily infer, what prayer accompanies them),⁹¹ Odysseus certainly does not ask Demodocus to stop singing. Nor can it simply be that, as a guest, he is not entitled to ask such a thing and depends on Alcinous (from whom in fact he tries to conceal his emotions) to give the instruction. An Odysseus who found the song unbearable, like Penelope in book 1, could hardly be the Odysseus who makes an opportunity, later in the evening, to request from Demodocus a further song about himself—a song he has reason to expect will duplicate or renew his experience of the first. If we try to negate that expectation, as some scholars do, by supposing that in making his request Odysseus is looking for the

⁸⁹ The 'grievous' (λυγρός) subject-matter of the song makes the song itself grievous, i.e. unbearably painful, for Penelope: 1.327/341. λυγρός has strong associations with death, including the possibility of Odysseus': see e.g. 3.87–93, 14.90, 15.268. Penelope's position is parallel to that of the Athenian reaction to Phrynichus' tragedy *The Capture of Miletus* (Hdt. 6.21), which is sometimes inappropriately cited, e.g. Finkelberg 1998: 177–8, as an analogue for *Odysseus'* reaction to Demodocus' songs. Cf. also Ch. 1, 1–4.

⁹⁰ Schopenhauer (1988: ii. 688, tr. in Schopenhauer 1966: ii. 592), takes Odysseus' tears in book 8 to be a self-pitying response to the gap between his former glories and his present misery. Cf. n. 107 below.

⁹¹ Since such prayers can be prospective or retrospective, the line is compatible with different interpretations of Odysseus' weeping.

uplift of panegyric or is in the process of reasserting his 'true' heroic self, we will have to pay the price of rendering him grossly self-ignorant about his own emotions; and that is far too high a price to pay.⁹² It is one thing to see the larger pattern of Odysseus' experiences at the Phaeacian court as a transitional process which includes the slow recovery of confidence in his identity and even his fame. But it is quite another to suppose that rediscovered confidence in his life-story will make good sense of his compulsively emotional response to Demodocus' performances. We are left, then, with the nagging, awkward question: why does Odysseus choose to hear that further song?

The dramatic psychology of that choice and its consequences invites and yet also, in a sense, blocks interpretation. Neither narrator nor character offers a transparent explanation. Yet between them, I submit, they convey the strong if mysterious impression that Odysseus *wants to repeat* the experience of the first song—wants to be exposed once more to the emotions which it made well up in him. This point not only parallels, in its own more sharply focused way, the Phaeacians' calls for continued performances from Demodocus (8.90–1). It also makes Odysseus ironically emblematic, and in highly peculiar circumstances, of the irresistible longing or desire (*ἔμπερος*) which we earlier saw that song is characteristically thought to arouse: the longing to hear more, to be drawn more deeply into the world conjured up by the song. What stamps Odysseus' case as exceptional is of course the personal and highly fraught memories which are touched by Demodocus' songs. But that does not make those songs merely a trigger for memory.⁹³ On the contrary, the relationship

⁹² I differ here from Rutherford 1986: 155, 'What Odysseus expects is, in effect, a panegyric of his own strategic and military successes'; cf. Rüter 1969: 237, Nünlist 1998: 90. That would make sense in different circumstances, but not in the light of Odysseus' emotional response to Demodocus' first song. Heubeck, *CHO* ii. 128, bizarrely suggests that the effect of Demodocus' third song on Odysseus is precisely the result of 'praise'. Rinon (2008: 121) begs the question by asserting, 'Obviously, Odysseus does not want to repeat . . . his crying'. I have no idea what Hainsworth, *CHO* iii. 378, means by calling it a 'pleasing irony' that Odysseus is 'the hero of the song'. Plutarch's suggestion, *Mor.* 20a, that Odysseus is implicitly correcting the licentiousness of Demodocus' Ares-Aphrodite song, is pious wishful thinking.

⁹³ Ledbetter (2003: 35–7) argues that neither Odysseus nor Penelope responds 'to poetry as such', only to 'associated memories', and that neither has 'a genuinely poetic experience' (her emphasis), phrases whose seemingly aestheticist presuppositions go against the grain of the *Odyssey*. Odysseus' request at 8.487–98 is linked directly to admiration for the eloquence of Demodocus' singing; and if it is memories *per se* that

between Odysseus' reaction to the first song and his request for the third indicates that he finds in (and wants from) the songs something which his own first-person knowledge of the events cannot alone supply.

That difference consists surely of something other than factually true 'information', which can hardly in itself make adequate sense of the emotional intensity of Odysseus' reactions. Although Odysseus' request to Demodocus, with its praise of the eyewitness-like immediacy of the bard's first song (8.491), is frequently adduced by critics as prime evidence of a Homeric conception of epic as a kind of 'true history', the progression of the scene as a whole suggests that what affects Odysseus in the power of Demodocus' singing is something more than scrupulous accuracy.⁹⁴ Odysseus can in principle vouch independently for such accuracy. The Phaeacians, however, do not know that at this stage and therefore cannot understand his public praise of Demodocus in that light. Odysseus' desire to hear more—so different from Penelope's unbearable anguish in book 1—betrays to the epic's own audience that in the experience of the songs he seeks a value which can supplement and even transform his first-person memories of the past. Demodocus' inspiration offers Odysseus a means of contemplating his own life, but pictured outside himself, as it were, and 'objectified' in the special form of song. If the experience threatens nonetheless to overwhelm him, that is not because he is impeded from appreciating the songs in their own right. It is because he can hear them more deeply than anyone else.

upset Penelope, an individual song should not be critical (she already lives perpetually with the memories). Arist. *Poet.* 16.1455a2–3, primarily concerned with classifying the 'recognition' that follows (cf. n. 87 above), need not take Odysseus' response to the song to be exclusively a matter of memory. When, in *Poet.* 15.1454a29–31, Aristotle complains about Odysseus' lament (for his lost men) in Timotheus' *Scylla* (793 PMG), he must have in mind something more than weeping as such, pace Lucas 1968: 159.

⁹⁴ De Jong (2001: 215) speaks of 'vivid evocation' as opposed to 'historical accuracy', Macleod (1983: 6) regards the two things as entwined in 'authenticity'. Puelma (1989: 67–73) sees authentic vividness only as an aspect of the 'documentary' [*sic*] truth-claims of Homeric song; Edwards (1987: 18) thinks the truth of song may be equivalent to carrying conviction but he does not integrate this suggestion with his other remarks. Adkins (1972: 16–17) misses the point. Ford (1992: 49–56) calls Homeric vividness 'epiphanic', an overstatement; Bakker (2007: esp. 154–76), stresses the 'presence' of the past through memory.

In support of this way of reading the scene—this way of trying to articulate the problems of poetics which the scene enacts—it is worth reconsidering two particular phrases in Odysseus' speech to Demodocus which have received repeated emphasis from scholars. The first is *κατὰ κόσμον* (489), which refers back to (part of) what impressed Odysseus about Demodocus' first song; the second is *κατὰ μοῖραν* (496), which refers to a quality which Odysseus hopes to find in the song of the Wooden Horse. It is misguided to hang an interpretation of the scene, in all its psychological drama, on a rigid construal of these two adverbial phrases, neither of which carries a simple or perspicuous sense in the present context. I therefore question the supposed stress on narrative accuracy and sequence which a number of scholars have taken these phrases to mark. All four of the other Odyssean occurrences of *κατὰ κόσμον* are qualified by a negative: they categorize words or actions as inappropriate, out of place, or in some respect unfitting, but none of them directs attention to narrative sequence or accuracy *per se*.⁹⁵ Iliadic usage, in which *κατὰ κόσμον* never appeals directly to ideas of truth, bears out the broad inference that *κόσμος*, whether observed as present or regretted as absent, signifies an attractive congruence of elements (made or shaped by someone's action, not simply given), varying in nature according to the domain or setting involved. Thersites' words, for instance, are branded by the narrator as 'ugly' (*ἄκοσμα*) and 'unfitting' (*οὐ κατὰ κόσμον*) because they breach decorum and strike notes of discord, not because they are false or in the wrong sequence. And of the other seven Iliadic occurrences of (*οὐ*) *κατὰ κόσμον*, none concerns speech at all, but (im)proper, (un)seemly, or (un)skilfully controlled behaviour of other kinds.⁹⁶

Odysseus' praise of Demodocus, therefore, in close proximity to his description of the Wooden Horse itself as *ἱππου κόσμον... | δουρατέου*, 'the beautiful design of the wooden horse' (8.492–3), is compatible with something richer, something less clear-cut, than a

⁹⁵ The other cases are 3.138 (an irregular, drunken assembly), 8.179 (misplaced insults), 14.363 (Eumaeus' rejection of reckless claims about Odysseus), 20.181 (unseemly begging). Of these, the second and third entail but do not simply denote lack of truth: 8.179 rebukes Euryalus for ungracious, provocative treatment of a guest, while 14.363 treats the claims about Odysseus as manipulative, as well as jarring with what Eumaeus is prepared to believe about his absent master.

⁹⁶ Thersites: *Il.* 2.213–14; cf. the threatened quarrel at *Hom. Hymn* 4.255. Other usage: *Il.* 5.759, 8.12, 10.472, 11.48 = 12.85, 17.205, 24.622.

strictly sequential, 'point-by-point' account of events.⁹⁷ This is particularly so given that the *kosmos* of the song itself is placed by Odysseus in piquant juxtaposition to its grim and sprawling subject-matter:

λίην γὰρ κατὰ κόσμον Ἀχαιῶν οἶτον αἰείδεις,
 ὅσσ' ἔρξαν τ' ἔπαθόν τε καὶ ὅσσ' ἐμόγησαν Ἀχαιοί,
 ὥς τέ που ἦ αὐτὸς παρεὼν ἦ ἄλλου ἀκούσας. (8.489–91)

You sing so beautifully of the doom of the Achaeans,
 All their deeds, all their sufferings, all their toils,
 As though you were somehow present yourself or had heard from
 another.

This sentence follows Odysseus' laudatory suggestion that Demodocus must have been taught by either a Muse or Apollo: taught, that is, his abilities as a singer, not the particular contents of this song. The compliment yields a paradox—a song of (quasi-)divine beauty and coherence about the vast miseries of a long war—which is comparable to the subtext I earlier traced in the opening invocations of both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. It is also important to say that the eyewitness-like authenticity of line 491 does not give us a reason to limit the criteria of Odysseus' praise to those of sequential conformity to the

⁹⁷ For the 'point-by-point' interpretation see esp. Finkelberg 1998: 124–30; cf. Webster 1939: 175 ('no gaps'), Lanata 1963: 12–13 (likewise), Marg 1971: 10, Walsh 1984: 7–9 ('serial' order plus reference to social order: a muddled argument), Thalmann 1984: 129 ('truly'), Goldhill 1991: 57 ('in order'; cf. *ibid.* 68, 'how it is'), Nagy 1999: 100 ('correct'), Scodel 2002: 65 ('in order'). Finkelberg's case is schematic (cf. n. 100 below): she ignores the contextually adapted nuances of *κατὰ κόσμον* and the narrative complexity hinted at by the synopsis of Demodocus' third song (see my text); the latter refutes Finkelberg's inference (130) that 'Homer [*sic*] considered any arrangement of events which deviated from their succession in reality [what about simultaneous events?] as the equivalent of a lie' (likewise Walsh 1984: 13, 'each . . . fact . . . fixed in its actual order'). Nor does *κατὰ κόσμον* at *Hom. Hymn* 4.433 oblige one to see catalogue-like implications at *Od.* 8.489; the same hymn also uses the phrase (479) of musical beauty and expressiveness. Macleod (1983: 5–6) links *κατὰ κόσμον* closely to truth, but includes vividness and beauty in this; cf. Macleod 1982: 1, 'so finely'. Russell, in Russell and Winterbottom 1972: 2, translates 'beautifully'. Murray (1981: 93–4, 98), without translating, takes the phrase to refer as much to the song's form/construction as to its contents; there are no grounds to take *kosmos* to imply a content/form split, pace Stehle 2001: 111; rightly, Verdenius 1983: 53 (denying, n. 183, that *kosmos* refers to the order of contents). Maehler (1963: 39) sees a link with poetic technique (but contrast 32?). Cf. Schadewaldt 1965: 71, 1966: 25 ('Sangesordnung'), Pratt 1993: 44–5 (appropriateness independently of strict veracity), Nünlist 1998: 90–1 (plus 91–7 for other archaic versions of poetic *kosmos*). The attempt of Ford 2002: 35, cf. Svenbro 1976: 31, to relate *κατὰ κόσμον* to the social context of performance cannot explain the sequence of thought in *Il.* 488–9: see Halliwell 2003a: 177.

events themselves. The quality predicated of an eyewitness account might itself be taken to be at least as much a matter of vivid immediacy of depiction and feeling as one of factual accuracy.⁹⁸ 'Eye-witness' authenticity does not in any case obscure the suggestion in *κατὰ κόσμον* of something not just passively reproduced but actively shaped and enhanced by the singer's own mastery of words, including perhaps the beauty of the musical performance itself.⁹⁹ Finally, it bears reiterating that to the addressee Demodocus, as to the rest of the listening Phaeacians, the force of *κατὰ κόσμον* cannot intelligibly signify an ascription of 'factual' accuracy or truth to the bard's song, since the identity of Odysseus and therefore his credentials for making such an assertion are as yet unknown to them.

Given the direction of Odysseus' thought in his praise of Demodocus, it is reasonable to hear the thrust of *κατὰ κόσμον* in this passage as carrying over to *κατὰ μοῖραν* (496) as well. The latter phrase is itself widely used in Homer to mark approval of speech acts which are deemed to do full justice to the needs of their context, most typically, however, in the form of insight or advice rather than narrative statements. Even when coupled, as here, with the verb *καταλέγειν* (to 'recount'), the semantics of the phrase are not narrowly fixed.¹⁰⁰ Applied to song, both expressions used by Odysseus

⁹⁸ Cf. the idea of eyewitness-like immediacy at Arist. *Poet.* 17.1455a23–5, where the events in question are implicitly fictional.

⁹⁹ The idea of active control of materials conveyed by *kosmos* terminology is clear in Homeric use of the verbs *διακοσμεῖν* (e.g. *Il.* 2.476, *Od.* 22.457), *κατακοσμεῖν* (*Il.* 4.118, 'fitting' arrow to bowstring); cf. Kerschensteiner 1962: 4–10, Worman 2002: 22–3. For connections with singing/music, cf. *εὐκόσμως* at Thgn. 242, with the verb *κατακοσμεῖν* in Pind. fr. 31 (n. 52 above). Archaic texts in which the phrase *κόσμον ἐπέων vel sim.* occurs all imply verbally/expressively fine construction: see esp. Solon 1.2 *IEG*, Parmen. B8.52 DK, Democr. B21 DK; cf. Halliwell 2002a: 5 n. 14, and note the probable phrase *κ[όσμον ἀο]ιδῆς* in Simon. 11.23 *IEG*. The motif was reworked to express the 'Alexandrian' aesthetic of the *poeta doctus* in Philotas 10.3 CA (cf. Antipater Thess. *Anth. Pal.* 11.20.3); for the verb *εὐκοσμεῖν* (of certain linguistic features) in Hellenistic criticism, see Phld. *Poem* 1.24.3–4 ~ 185.15–16 Janko (2000), = Andromenides F35 (Janko 2000: 151), with the simplex verb, also used by Andromenides, for the effect of poetic sounds on the ears, Phld. *Poem.* 1.175.14. Other *kosmos* terminology in Greek poetics includes Thuc. 1.10.3, 1.21.1 (with Ch. 1, 20–2), Ar. *Frogs* 1027, Pl. *Phdr.* 245a (cf. *Symp.* 177c, synonymous with *ὑμνεῖν*), *Ion* 530d (of interpretation: Ch. 4 n. 26), Isoc. 9.5–6 (Ch. 6 n. 81); note *Certamen* 338 (Allen) for Homer himself as *ἡρώων κομήτορα*.

¹⁰⁰ Finkelberg (1998: 127–9) argues on the basis of metrical isomorphy that *κατὰ μοῖραν κατέλεξα(ς)/καταλέξῃς* (with lengthening of the second syllable of *κατά*) must be semantically equivalent to *ἀληθεῖν καταλέξω (vel sim.)* and denotes a truthful account/narration. But at *Od.* 3.331 *κατὰ μοῖραν* refers to *advice* not to narrative at all,

might be thought to presuppose control and shaping of narrative structure, but there is no reason to take either to suggest any one particular kind of narrative ordering. As it happens, the Homeric narrator's synopsis of the third song indicates something other than a temporally linear narrative presentation: it involves the recounting of simultaneous or overlapping actions (the 'fake' departure of the Greek fleet and the concealment of Odysseus and others inside the Wooden Horse, 500–3), both analepsis (a reversal of chronological order, 503–4) and prolepsis (anticipation of a later event, 510–13), and further simultaneous actions (in the sack of the city, 516–18).¹⁰¹

Between them, then, *κατὰ κόσμον* and *κατὰ μοῖραν* convey a sense that Odysseus finds in Demodocus' singing not so much a correct recapitulation of events in a given sequence as an arrangement of those events into an expressively compelling form: a new object of experience even for Odysseus himself, who in the third song at any rate hears a narrative which reaches beyond the scope of what his first-person testimony might encompass.¹⁰² To Homer's audience, though not to the Phaeacians, Odysseus displays an *emotional recognition* that the songs tell him something more than the contents of his own memories. They seem to do so not by erasing the sorrows he (now) associates with those memories but by making them somehow more concentrated (hence his surge of barely controllable weeping and sobbing) but also more meaningful (hence his desire to listen further to Demodocus) within the ordered yet transfixing *kosmos* of the story. We are left to infer that Odysseus has no need to hear a merely accurate reminder of what he has lived through. He needs, in a

while at *Od.* 10.16 (=12.35) truth is implied but *κατὰ μοῖραν* need not signify narrative sequence as such (and note the reference to answering a *series* of questions, 10.14, 12.34). Moreover, *ἀληθείην καταλέξω* and related phrases mostly refer to truthfulness or frankness and have no implications for narrative order; nor, contrary to Krischer 1965: 168–72, 1971: 146–58, Kannicht 1980: 18, is the sense of *καταλέγειν* reducible to completeness of 'information', hardly the main point at e.g. *Il.* 9.115, 19.186 (*advice*: cf. above), *Od.* 4.239 (cf. the concession in Finkelberg 1998: 148–50, though her translation of *εἰκόστα* as 'plausible' is dubious), 11.368. '(Things) as they happened', Ledbetter 2003: 16, is an untenable translation of *κατὰ μοῖραν*. The attempt of Walsh (1984: 17–18) to contrast Odysseus' use of *κατὰ μοῖραν* and *κατὰ κόσμον* involves a confused reading of the passage. Cf. Luther 1935: 69.

¹⁰¹ For other narratological points, cf. de Jong 2001: 215–16. Analepsis and prolepsis were also signalled as features of Demodocus' first song, 8.79–82.

¹⁰² Certainly in the details of other warriors' exploits, 514–16, and perhaps (though this is rather imponderable) in the details of the Trojan debate, 505–9.

way which even so threatens to overwhelm his long-suffering mind, to hear his life transfigured into the quasi-divine beauty that he discovers in Demodocus' singing.¹⁰³

The resulting paradoxes of the scene are brought to a piercing climax by the simile which describes Odysseus' response to the third song (8.523–31). The simile compares his tears to those of a woman collapsed over the body of her dying warrior husband while enemy soldiers jab her in the back with their spears and prepare to drag her off into slavery. This unforgettable passage has understandably received close attention from critics. Many have taken it to intimate that Odysseus himself is brought by Demodocus' song to feel pity for the *losers* in war. The woman in the simile, on this reading, is perceived as a surrogate for Troy, or even for the victims of war in general, while Odysseus, though himself a victor, now sees beyond his original partisanship to the deeper level of universal human suffering. He has a flow of spontaneous compassion for the pain of others comparable, one might say, to Andrei Bolkonsky's profound reaction to the sight of Anatole Kuragin's amputation in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*.¹⁰⁴

That interpretation is, I believe, both tempting and yet disputable. It is tempting because the simile itself so unmistakably condenses into

¹⁰³ One might even think of this as a mythologized Homeric intuition of one kind of catharsis. Cf. n. 71 above for an ancient view of catharsis in a different Homeric passage; Schadeewaldt (1965: 84) sees an affinity between catharsis and the deep pleasure of song in Homer. Zimmermann (2004: 214) compares Odysseus' desire to repeat the 'bittersweet pain' of song to the idea of 'grief-loving longing' (*πόθος φιλοπενθήης*) in Gorg. *Hel.* 9; since the latter (cf. Ch. 6, 280–1) is itself a reworking of the Homeric paradox of a 'desire' for grief (see nn. 14, 18 above), this makes good sense. Cf. Baumgarten 2009: 102.

¹⁰⁴ *War and Peace*, vol. 3, part 2, ch. 37: Tolstoy 2007: 813–14. On the Homeric simile, see Mattes 1958: 115–22 (stressing Odysseus' grief for the loss of his 'former self'), Macleod 1982: 4–5, 1983: 11, Walsh 1984: 4, Garvie 1994: 339, Cairns 2001*b*: 27, 2009: 43–4, Nagy 1999: 101, Diano 1968: 206, Segal 1994: 121–3, Buxton 2004: 149 (adding overtones of Penelope), Rinon 2008: 123–4. Cf., more equivocally, de Jong 2001: 217, though 'objectivity' seems inapt for a context where Odysseus' mind, on any account, is flooded with emotion. The most sensitive version of a reading which ascribes conscious pity to Odysseus himself is Rutherford 1986: 155–6, who takes Demodocus' song to make Odysseus see 'that his own sufferings . . . are . . . mirror-images' of the sufferings of the Trojans; but this still presupposes something which the simile does not tell us (cf. 'he realizes . . . the common ground between friend and foe', 156). Pucci (1987: 222), also taking Odysseus to weep 'out of pity', confuses matters by describing the woman too as feeling pity (for herself and her husband): grief and pity are quite different things.

a plangent image of tragedy the circumstances of defeat in war. The harrowing vividness of the woman's collapse—shrieking with grief and slumped over the body of her husband convulsed by the gasps of his death-throes (526), while the victors jab her with spears and start to pull her away—is remarkable for a specificity of visualization which, however Iliadic its connotations, is never quite matched anywhere in the *Iliad* itself, though the remarkable reminiscences of Briseis in her lament for Patroclus do make a particularly instructive comparison.¹⁰⁵ The Odyssean passage itself, then, is a penetrating song of pity, one which prompts us, among other things, to imagine the woman's *face* in close-up (530), as analogue to Odysseus' (522, 531), and to see the two figures juxtaposed ironically in a single perspective. But this poignant effect should not induce us to elide the difference between the expressiveness of the Homeric image and what we are told about Odysseus himself. The simile states unequivocally that Odysseus weeps *like* the shrieking woman, with tears precisely as 'pitiful' (ἐλεεινόν... δάκρυον, 532) as her anguish (ἐλεεινοτάτω ἄχρῃ, 531).¹⁰⁶ Without making such a woman part of Odysseus' own consciousness, this aligns his state of mind with hers, making it difficult to avoid the inference that he now feels himself to be more a victim than a victor of war. That chimes, moreover, with the evidence of other parts of the poem—most proximately in his answer to Alcinous at the start of book 9 (12–13) but also in a series of earlier passages—that Odysseus does indeed see his own life in retrospect as a story of 'woes', κῆδεα.¹⁰⁷

That dimension of the simile reinforces the paradox of Odysseus' psychological state at this juncture. It does so not just in virtue of its

¹⁰⁵ At *Il.* 19.292–4 (where she is slumped over the body of Patroclus himself, 284: compare *Od.* 8.527, a close correspondence) Briseis recalls seeing her husband and brothers cut down in front of Lyrnessus; *Il.* 295–300 evoke how instead of being simply dragged off into captivity (like the Odyssean woman) Briseis was consoled and treated gently by Patroclus: something she now feels as tragically ironic in the light of Patroclus' own death. (The whole scene, as it happens, is observed by Odysseus: *Il.* 19.310.) The *Iliad* also, of course, contains images of how an enemy's wife's grief can (brutally) enhance a successful warrior's satisfaction: see esp. 11.393–5 and 18.122–4, with Griffin 1980: 120–22.

¹⁰⁶ The verb *τήκομαι* (522), when used elsewhere of weeping in Homer, refers only to women: *Il.* 3.176, *Od.* 19.204–8, 264; cf. Russo, *CHO* iii. 87.

¹⁰⁷ See esp. 6.165, 7.147, 152, 242, 297, 8.154; cf. Alcinous' echo of κῆδεα at 11.369, 376. Menelaus had already used the word of Odysseus' post-Trojan life at 4.108. For Odysseus' tears in book 8 as *self*-pitying, see Lloyd 1987: 87–8; cf. n. 90 above.

startling 'feminization' of the most hardbitten of Greek heroes, but also by exhibiting the capacity of song to draw Odysseus compulsively (the implication of his request) into an experience to which he knows that emotional turmoil is unavoidably attached. Odysseus weeps as pitifully as the woman widowed by war, yet he *chose* the song which has this effect on him. His frame of mind, in a way which the narrative leaves tantalizingly hard to decipher, seems to lie beyond a pure dichotomy of pleasure and pain, a point he half-articulates himself at the start of book 9.¹⁰⁸ Odysseus shares with the Achilles of *Iliad* 9.186–91 and the Helen of *Iliad* 6.357–8 not only a capacity but also a kind of need to contemplate the turning of his own life (and the world he has lived through) into song.

Each of these three cases has its own subtly time-related particularity. Helen half-desolately, half-wistfully imagines a *future* process by which suffering becomes the material of song; she does so in a spirit of self-accusation which leaves her remark delicately poised between a negative insinuation (that future song will itself condemn her and Paris) and the hint of at least a partial, proleptic consolation in the thought of a posthumous counterbalance to her sufferings, a hint given moving fulfilment by the Homeric moment itself.¹⁰⁹ Achilles goes further: he starts to *perform* the conversion of his life into song in the midst of his own troubled consciousness, though to do so even he requires a sort of affective displacement onto the parallel lives of others, while the quasi-solipsism of his action is mirrored in the veiling of the specific contents of his song from the Homeric audience. Odysseus, finally, finds that the passage from life to song has *already* taken place: it overtakes him, and catches him emotionally unprepared, amid hospitable strangers (a keenly receptive audience, yet looking in, as it were, from the outside) whom he will soon leave behind for ever. Furthermore, by making Odysseus simultaneously the subject and audience of song, this process overrides the distinction later drawn by critics like Gorgias and Plato

¹⁰⁸ Odysseus speaks of appreciating the beauty of Demodocus' songs (9.3–11), while going on to stress the unhappiness which he has partly betrayed in his reaction to those songs (12–13). Marg (1971: 15) argues (too briefly) that Odysseus' experience of the songs ultimately strengthens his sense of self; cognate readings in Mattes 1958: 112–22, Rüter 1969: 235–8; cf. n. 92 above.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Taplin (1992: 97–8) for connections with other ways in which the Iliadic Helen 'belongs... to the future'. For the context of self-blame in which Helen's reference to future song belongs, see the subtle account of Blondell (2010a).

between poetry's presentation of 'the lives of others' and the intimate impact it can have on the souls of its hearers.¹¹⁰ But once he has been exposed to the process, Odysseus himself chooses, in the depths of his own grief, to repeat and embrace it.

These three Homeric figures betray, then, a kindred awareness that song is a supreme means of coming to terms with, and in some degree helping to redeem, the burden of their stories—song in which 'truth' is not a self-sufficient matter of preserving a record, but something more like an intensification and clarification of what was at stake, what was won and lost, in the actions and sufferings of those concerned. The narrative, memorializing functions of song transform and reorganize the unique particulars of lived experience into highly charged but renewable patterns of meaning and feeling, turning them into all-engrossing, soul-changing experiences in their own right. Part of the symbolic resonance for the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* themselves of the three passages cited above is clear enough: Achilles, Helen, and Odysseus all stand in need of the very epics in which they appear, if the emotional and ethical importance of their lives is not to be lost.

But the Homeric poems also make a powerful point, as I have argued, of leaving a sort of shroud of psychological incompleteness around the minds of their characters in these moments of acute self-awareness, withholding from them an explicit understanding of the value of song even while showing them in the act of being drawn towards such value and simultaneously arousing the desire for it in the poems' own audiences. That incompleteness can perhaps count, in the final analysis, as a complement to the wisdom of never setting foot on the island of the Sirens, who lure their hearers with the promise of making total sense of their existence but actually threaten a kind of psychotropic paralysis. The mystery of the Odyssean Sirens is bound up with the thought that their promise is irresistibly beautiful yet would be incompatible, if fully realized, with the possibility of continuing to live. Humans need song but would cease to be human if they tried to exist in the realms of song alone.¹¹¹ If there is a poetics in

¹¹⁰ That poetry is about the lives of 'other people' yet an intimate event inside the soul of the hearer is the *aperçu* of Gorg. *Hel.* 9, subsequently taken up at *Pl. Resp.* 10.606b; cf. Ch. 4, 206, Ch. 6, 275, 281–2.

¹¹¹ Unlike the Muses, of whom they are a *deceptive* duplicate, the Odyssean Sirens (rival conceptions existed: Gantz 1993: 150) do not adapt their transfixingly beautiful song to the complex reality of human needs. For the 'total sense' of existence they offer

Homer, one element of it resides in the pathos of a recognition that song itself can express but cannot solve all the problems of existence.

see *Od.* 12.187–91; for the fatal ‘psychotropic paralysis’ they cause, 12.39–46. Readings of the Sirens include Ford 1992: 82–6, Segal 1994: 100–6, Pucci 1998: 1–9 (conflating psychological and ‘textual’ frames of reference), Doherty 1995: 135–9, Ledbetter 2003: 27–34. Lanata (1963: 9) is not alone in forgetting that what the Sirens say at 12.188 is (partly) *false* (no one returns from their island), though the *idea* of learning from the deep pleasure of song in a less absolute way is an important clue to the possibilities of ‘Homeric’ song (cf. n. 15 above). Note, obliquely but thought-provokingly, Alcibiades’ comparison of Socrates to the Sirens at *Pl. Symp.* 216a: Socrates tells him a truth about himself which is (almost) irresistible but which would make his (ordinary) life *unlivable*. For ancient allegorical interpretations of the Sirens, see e.g. Burkert 1972: 351, Wedner 1994.

3

Aristophanes' *Frogs* and the Failure of Criticism

τοῦ γὰρ ἀορίστου ἀόριστος καὶ ὁ κανὼν ἔστιν.

To deal with what is indefinite we need a rule which is itself indefinite.

(Aristotle)

And since they are always with us, the values of works of art are constantly being challenged, defended, judged, and judged again. But how to judge them?

(Kundera)¹

A COMIC LESSON IN TRAGIC POETICS?

Aristophanes' *Frogs* occupies a peculiar place in relation to the history of poetics. It is the only theatrical drama (as opposed to dialogues like Plato's *Ion* or Dryden's essay 'Of Dramatic Poesy') which regularly receives attention in histories of poetic theory and literary criticism. The play is often elevated, in fact, to the status of a critical text in its own right, finding itself anthologized and discussed alongside the canonical prose writings which usually serve to define the development of the subject. Nor is it just classicists who typically (though not universally) think of *Frogs* in these terms.² No less imposing a figure

¹ Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 5.10, 1137b29–30. Kundera 2007: 16.

² Snell 1953: 113–35 (in places highly tendentious) remains a basic reference point for the idea of *Frogs* as a landmark in the history of criticism; see esp. 115 ('even

than Harold Bloom has pronounced that 'criticism...found three separate beginnings in Aristophanes, Plato, and Aristotle'³—a bold schematization, but one which testifies to the perception of *Frogs* as a work which rather than simply taking a comic angle on the idea of poetic criticism actively contributes to the possibilities of such criticism. Such a perception lurks with potent significance in, of all places, Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*, as well as being a silent presence in some of his other reflections on tragedy.⁴ Nietzsche's characterization of Euripides, especially in section 11 of the *Birth*, as the person who 'killed' tragedy (or, more vividly, committed tragic suicide) by bringing the mentality of the ordinary tragic spectator into the world of his plays, is directly dependent on *Frogs*. So too is his notion of the alliance of Euripides with Socratic rationalism, a notion which appears only once, but very memorably (and, as we shall see, problematically), in the final choral song of Aristophanes' play (1491–9). Nietzsche exploits the Aristophanic antithesis of Aeschylean and Euripidean values to construct his para-historical account of the trajectory of Greek tragedy from what he sees as its quintessential moment in the late archaic era of Aeschylus—whose hard, militaristic contemporaries Nietzsche thinks could alone tap the deepest level of tragic experience—to its decline and fall in the decadent age of

to-day's literary criticism is indebted to his influence'; *Frogs* is the 'first exposition as a doctrine' of the 'moralization of poetry'). Against the view of *Frogs* as 'the first major work of Greek literary criticism' (Willi 2002: 119), note the dissent of Rosen 2004: 319, '*Frogs* is no more a work of literary theory than *Clouds* is of philosophy'; cf. Goldhill 1991: 206, 'an extraordinary—a comically disproportionate—influence on the history of literary criticism'. Dover (1970: 231) puts his finger on an intractable problem, 'the difficulty of distinguishing between criticism of poetry and ridicule of criticism'; cf. Harriott 1969: 148, Aristophanes 'criticizes criticism'. Willi 2003: 94, '*Frogs* stages, rather than laughs at, literary criticism', is a one-sided conclusion (though his treatment of 'technical terms' in the play, 87–94, is cogent). *Frogs*' relationship to the later history of ancient criticism is the linchpin of Hunter 2009: see esp. 2–52, 128–34.

³ Bloom 1986: 2, though making Longinus the inventor of criticism as a full 'art' (see Ch. 7 n. 79); cf. Bloom 1994: 17 (with 18 for Bloom's own rejection of both the Platonic and Aristotelian traditions). General historians of literary criticism sometimes regard *Frogs* in a similar way: e.g. Wimsatt and Brooks 1957: 4 ('the earliest piece of extended literary criticism').

⁴ On Nietzsche's indebtedness to *Frogs*, see Silk and Stern 1981: 36–7, 207, von Reibnitz 1992: 280–312 (several refs.), Snell 1953: 118–21, 134 (stressing A. W. Schlegel as intermediary), Halliwell 2003c: 105–6. Nietzsche's reliance on *Frogs* was probably encouraged by Wagner, who knew the play well: for Wagner's own interest in the Aeschylus–Euripides contrast, see O'Sullivan 1990; cf. Borchmeyer 1992: 330, Silk and Stern 1981: 219.

Euripides, whose contemporaries were supposedly attracted to seeing their own neurotic, bourgeois concerns mirrored in the theatre.

It is an immense cultural distance from a species of comedy performed by grotesquely masked, padded, and phallically equipped actors to the post-Romantic metaphysical intuitions of *The Birth of Tragedy*. Yet somehow this is a distance of ideas which *Frogs* has managed to traverse. Furthermore, Nietzsche's (tacit) adoption of the Aristophanic polarity between Aeschylean and Euripidean prototypes of tragedy is, despite its special purposes, an ancestor of the kind of treatment which *Frogs* has received, in more academically pedestrian manner, from many recent scholars. The second half of *Frogs* fixes its gaze so tenaciously on tragedy (scrutinizing 'the poetry, the songs, the *sinews*' of the genre: τᾶπη, τὰ μέλη, τὰ νεῦρα τῆς τραγωδίας, 862) that it has proved hard to resist the temptation to believe that, however wild its flights of fancy may be, the play can make us intimate with fifth-century Athenian experience of tragic theatre. We know that Old Comedy in general drew material for its own scenarios from the musico-poetic culture of contemporary Athens. The result was a rich seam of 'metapoetic' theatre. Not just Aristophanes (whose lost plays include the titles *Dramas* and *Poetry*—though titles alone do not disclose everything, as *Frogs* itself demonstrates) but playwrights like Cratinus (who based one of his works on his own stormy 'marriage' to personified Comedy), Pherecrates (whose *Cheiron* included a personified, and highly sexualized, figure of Music), Phrynichus (who staged a play called *Muses* at the very same festival as *Frogs*), and Plato comicus (whose titles include both *Poet* and *Poets*), all seem to have built comedies around explicitly poetic and musical themes.⁵

Aristophanes was exceptional, even so (and so far as we can tell), in the degree to which he found ways of making comedy directly out of *tragedy*. The evidence suggests that his paratragic obsession with Euripides, in particular, was not paralleled by any of his predecessors or rivals, though things may have been changing by the time a younger comic poet like Strattis came on the scene towards the end of the fifth century. This rather compulsive feature of Aristophanes' work must be part of the point of Cratinus' well-known description of a certain kind

⁵ Cf. Hall (2000) on the female personifications in question. Dover (1993: 24–8) surveys Old Comedy's treatment of 'literary critical' and metapoetic themes: for commentary on the fragmentary material, see Conti Bizzarro 1999, Olson 2007: 151–86.

of pretentiously subtle person as a 'Euripid-Aristophanizer'.⁶ The contest in *Frogs*, while reflecting a broader trend of its genre, also constitutes an unusually concentrated engagement with Old Comedy's 'sister'-art of tragic theatre. Its closest rival in that respect is *Thesmophoriazusae*, but the fabric of the latter is woven more from parodic reworking and 'recomposition' of Euripidean texts and motifs, less from a comic interplay with quasi-theoretical (or, to borrow a Germanism, 'poetological') discourse about tragedy. *Frogs* is a work which not only goes in search of a tragic poet in Hades but ends up embroiled in an intricate concatenation of attempts to establish a set of criteria for judging the value of tragedy. While Dionysus makes his way to the underworld and back, *Frogs* has found its own way, rather improbably, into the academic history of poetics and literary criticism. But what kind of life can it sustain in the rarefied atmosphere of linguistic analysis, hermeneutic paradigms, and conceptual models of genre?

I shall argue in this chapter that while *Frogs* is indeed our most elaborate single item of 'evidence' for Athenian responses to tragedy, it is also a doubly awkward work to deal with in this respect: first, because its comic resources allow it a freedom of invention and imagination which resists confident interpretation (finding the right criteria with which to judge *Frogs* itself is a daunting challenge); secondly, because Dionysus' venture throws up an unresolved series of disagreements about the poetics of tragic theatre. On the first of those scores, we can never afford to lose sight of just how tricky a thing it is to make sense of an Aristophanic perspective on tragedy (or on anything else for that matter). All interpreters of Aristophanes should periodically remind themselves of the vignette, in the prologue of *Peace*, of a pretentious and *mistaken* Ionian spectator who provides an early instance of a long Western tradition, still going strong in Tom Stoppard for example, of comic swipes at the very idea of 'the critic': the person who knows better than the play itself, we might say,

⁶ Cratinus fr. 342: depending on punctuation of the fragment, the person described may be a spectator or someone else, though hardly Aristophanes himself, pace Luppe (2000) 19. See Conti Bizzarro 1999: 91–104, Ruffell 2002: 160, O'Sullivan 2006, Olson 2007: 110–11, Bakola 2008: 16–20 (assuming, perhaps too confidently, that the Euripid-Aristophanizer is addressing 'Cratinus' himself), 2010: 24–9; Zimmermann (2006*b*) correlates the fragment with features of Aristophanes' own work. Cf. n. 66 below. On the exceptional nature/degree of Aristophanes' interest in tragedy, cf. Silk 2000*a*: 49–52, 2000*b*: 302–5; on Strattis, see Bowie 2000: 323–4.

what the play is all about.⁷ If *Frogs* stages a quest to bring back a playwright from the dead (a comic trope, among other things, for the desire to keep poetry 'alive'), and if that quest becomes caught up in a debate about how to evaluate (tragic) poets in the first place, readings of *Frogs* have to take the risk of going in search of their own form of criticism with which to interpret the comedy itself.

But if *Frogs* 'doubles' the problems of criticism without ever discovering a way to settle them, then interpretation of the play cannot escape an especially precarious status. Not only does Dionysus end up changing his mind (in a far from transparent manner) about the poet he wants to bring back to life. In following the path that eventually leads to that dénouement, he acts out a kind of failure in his own mission: he fails, I shall suggest, to match up either the poet he originally went in search of (and the one he 'loved'), or the poet he ends up bringing back, with a cogent framework of criticism. He stumbles (comically) across the manifold difficulties—even, in a sense, the impossibility—of fixing a stable set of standards with which to judge tragic drama and poetry. Where, then, does that leave 'us' as would-be critics of *Frogs* itself?

A consensus has grown up, however, that we can make stronger sense than this of the plot and thematics of *Frogs*. We can read it, many scholars believe, as having a directional momentum which turns the contest of tragedians, together with the ultimate choice of Aeschylus over Euripides, into the enactment of a politico-ethical model of poetic values. On such accounts, Dionysus goes down to Hades to 'save' or 'preserve' (Dionysus' *retrospective* explanation, notice: 1419 etc.⁸) not only tragic theatre in its own right but the entire community, the Athenian polis, in which tragedy plays such a culturally prestigious role and which is itself in deep crisis (in fact, close to collapse and final defeat, as soon proved the case, in the long war against Sparta). Whatever his initial impulses, Dionysus ends up, it is claimed, seeing the need to restore to Athens a poet who can help save tragedy *and* the city at one and the same time. If tragedy is part of a civic culture of festival theatre, then in the final analysis the criteria for deciding what makes the best tragic poetry must be

⁷ The Ionian spectator is imagined misreading a comic allegory at *Peace* 43–8, a point strangely missed by Worman 2008: 63 n. 5. Cratinus fr. 342 (previous note) probably depicts another intellectualizing spectator-critic.

⁸ See 141–2 below.

orientated towards political, moral, and religious value for the community as a whole. Such, beneath the surface of Dionysiac bluster and buffoonery, is the authentic significance—both for its own time and for the larger history of Greek poetics—which many critics have identified in *Frogs*.

One of my aims in this chapter is to challenge this now widely shared and highly idealized way of reading the comedy. This view of *Frogs*, I shall contend, produces too tidy, too selective, and too 'teleologically' constructed an account of a play which makes life difficult for interpreters on the two simultaneous levels I have already referred to: in its plotting of Dionysus' volatile journey as lover-cum-critic of tragedy, and in its own concomitant elusiveness as an object of comic criticism.⁹ It is among the paradoxes of *Frogs* that, despite exposing a discrepant, discontinuous multiplicity of critical viewpoints, it has lured many modern interpreters into seeing in it the mirage of a coherent, unified poetics of tragedy (and, along the way, a poetics of comedy as well). A salient feature of the alternative I shall offer to the current orthodoxy on *Frogs* is the conviction that coming to terms with the work's comic dynamics involves finding in it the very reverse of a solution to the problems of tragic poetics. My case will look closely at many of the details of the contest of tragedians, including the wavering role played by Dionysus himself qua judge or 'critic' (*κριτής*) of the contest. As god of Athenian theatre, the divine patron of the festivals at which both tragedy and comedy are produced, he is able in a sense to represent both genres equally. Aristophanes converts this hybrid status into an essential ambiguity. He makes Dionysus a passionate lover of tragedy, but also an incorrigibly comic character.

The two traits fluctuate in relationship to one another but remain incapable of harmonization. The tension between them comes to a head—but also to a kind of triumph for comedy—in the peculiar conclusion to the contest. If there is (debatably) an intelligible core of

⁹ Cf. Rosen 2004: 310 on readings which make Dionysus' choice of Aeschylus 'teleologically necessary'. My own perspective complements Rosen's important article in several respects; the main differences between our convergent views are: first, the significance of Dionysus' eventual act of choice (see n. 90 below); second, where Rosen (esp. 314–20) invokes a dichotomy between 'poetic' and 'non-poetic' criteria, form and content, pleasure and morality, to claim *Frogs* as a 'critique of an excessively didactic approach to the evaluation of poetry' (316), I see the comedy as problematizing the idea of poetic evaluation in a more radical manner.

meaning to that conclusion, it does not lie, as I see it, in the advocacy of a 'civic poetics' of tragedy. It is to be located, rather, in the concerted comic exposure of the recalcitrant dilemmas posed by a conception of poetics which expects it to supply protocols for fully accountable verdicts. In the course of the contest, Dionysus finds himself becoming a sort of sounding board for all the shifting possibilities of a tragic poetics: for all the different kinds of interest, satisfaction, and judgement available to Athenian spectators of tragedy. It is not just that he is appointed official arbiter of the contest. The whole problem of 'criticism' (of judging, κρίνειν, or delivering a judgement, κρίσις¹⁰) is psychologically channelled through him, played out through his erratic, insecure reactions to the arguments (and prejudicial rhetoric) of the two tragedians. In keeping with his status as god of theatre, Dionysus functions as a sort of mobile, floating symbol of theatrical spectatorship and judgement. His eyes and ears bombarded with a surfeit of competing principles and contentions, he ends up *becoming* the problem of criticism—a problem he had not anticipated when he set out on his quest to bring back to life the poetic object of his passions.

My focus on the theme of tragic poetics, and correspondingly on Dionysus as embodiment of the lover-cum-critic of (tragic) poetry, means that I do not pretend to undertake anything like a 'complete' reading of *Frogs* (even supposing such a thing were conceivable). Many prominent aspects of the first half of the play, including various sides of Dionysus' 'multiple personality', will be left out of the picture, not least the whole sub-plot, as it were, of the god's pseudo-Heracleian *katabasis* to Hades and the chain of episodes in which this entangles him before the parabasis.¹¹ Before tackling the contest of

¹⁰ The noun κρίσις is used at 779, 785, 1467, the verb κρίνειν at 805, 873, 1411, 1415–16, 1467, 1473 (plus 1519, Aeschylus speaking of Sophocles); cf. the adverb δυσκρίτως, 1433, with 145–7 below. (All references to the text of *Frogs* are to the edn. of Dover (1993), unless otherwise indicated.) For Hellenistic and later usage of *kritikos* etc., see Ch. 6 n. 106, Ch. 7, 336. Note also the vocabulary of 'understanding', γινώσκειν and μαρθάνειν, at *Frogs* 809, 1111, 1114; cf. Ch. 4 n. 26.

¹¹ As regards Dionysus' relationship to poetry, note his sideswipe at Cinesias and Morsimus (151–3), which matches his vehemence at 92–5. Two other passages which involve aspects of the god's poetic 'sensitivity' can only be noted here. (1) The famous rowing competition with the frog chorus (209–68) is, among much else, an enacted metaphor for a tension between resisting and being part of the rhythmic mood of a lyric performance; further interpretation is complex: cf. Campbell 1984, Zimmermann 1984–7: i. 161–4, Parker 1997: 464–7. (2) The god's participation in the quasi-Eleusinian

tragedians itself, however, I do want to draw attention to some of the ways in which Aristophanes prepares the ground for it (subliminally, as far as his audience is concerned) in the first scene of *Frogs*. He does this most immediately by presenting Dionysus (or rather, making him present himself) as having well defined 'tastes' in poetry, both comic and tragic. Prior to banging on Heracles' door, Dionysus has already shown himself, in the opening lines of the play, to have strong feelings about *comedy* itself. In this notably metatheatrical passage, he reacts to Xanthias' questions about what kind of jokes he should crack for the audience by telling him (in effect) to steer clear of the supposedly clichéd routines and, in Bakhtinian parlance, the 'lower body' humour of Aristophanes' rivals. Such things make him 'feel sick'; he doesn't want to hear them unless he's 'about to vomit'.¹²

This expression of (comic) disgust is Dionysus' first 'critical' judgement in the play, a preliminary instance of a kind of instinctive, quasi-physical response which will reappear on several later occasions in the work. It is also, of course, layered with, and therefore complicated by, comic irony. An Aristophanic character is expressing disdain for things to which Aristophanic comedy itself is hardly averse—and which it is indeed theatrically recycling and reappropriating, with (perhaps) a difference, here and now. In particular, it is Dionysus himself who, in the process of warning Xanthias against mildly suggestive metaphors of physical discomfort, utters an outright crudity ('don't say, as you shift your load, that you're dying to *shit*', *χεζητῶς*, 8), before then expressing his visceral distaste for the further crudity which this prompts in turn from Xanthias (9–11). The type of comedy deprecated and the type being performed are intertwined. Aristophanes can have it both ways, leaving his audience free to laugh either with (or without) a knowing sense of superiority. Likewise, the character of Dionysus can be felt as

song-and-dance at 416–30 involves a surrender to unfettered comic scurrility: on the passage and its context, cf. Halliwell 2008: 211–14. For perspectives on Dionysus' multiplicity in *Frogs*, see Segal (1961), Lada-Richards (1999), Habash (2002), though all are too inclined to find unity amid multiplicity.

¹² Lines 4 (*χολή*) and 11 (*ἑξέμεῖν*) both use language related to nausea; cf. Kassel 1994: 34. Note the comparably vehement vocabulary, *βδελύττεσθαι* ('feel disgusted'), at Pl. *Resp.* 10.605e (in response, counterfactually, to tragedy). On the opening scene of *Frogs*, see e.g. Silk 2000a: 26–33, Slater 2002: 183–5; Heiden (1991: 97–9) argues that Dionysus is implicitly rejecting *Aristophanic* Old Comedy, and that this blindspot is the basis for the whole play's 'ironic' meaning (that comedy, not tragedy, offers civically valuable teaching): this ironic reading requires a contrived double vision (cf. nn. 83, 85 below).

working on more than one dramatic level. He is, without question, archetypally comic in the confusions and contradictions of his multiple personality: his brother Heracles will try in vain to stifle an outburst of laughter when he first sets eyes on him (42–5). But one of the roles Dionysus will try to play, as the opening exchanges with his slave have started to insinuate, is that of would-be connoisseur of poetry.

The ironic distance between Dionysus and the comic theatre in which he is performing is partly motivated, as soon transpires after he has knocked on Heracles' door, by the fact that the god has something else on his mind. It takes more than one detour—first in the logical conundrums (redolent of riddles but also of sophistic debating techniques) exchanged with Xanthias (25–32), and later in the sexual innuendo of the guessing game which Heracles plays with him (52–67)—before we reach the revelation of Dionysus' state of mind: an aching 'longing' (*πόθος*, 53, 55) for the recently deceased Euripides. The god of theatre's (ambiguous) distaste for 'low' comedy is matched, it seems, by a passionate attachment to at least one tragic poet. The term *pothos* used for Dionysus' state of mind sometimes signifies a state of strong erotic arousal and desire. That is how Heracles immediately takes it, misconstruing the clue given by his brother's reference to being struck by a sudden pang of longing when reading Euripides' *Andromeda* (52–3), a play whose heroine was herself a distinctive object of desire in the eyes of Perseus. But it is also used to capture the experience of sorely missing those who have died or are absent; this is how Dionysus will apply the cognate adjective *ποθεινός* to the tragic playwright Agathon (whom he also professes to admire) at line 84, and the cognate verb to the city's (mixed) feelings about Alcibiades at line 1425. Either way, the notion of *pothos* evokes a deep, intense 'ache'—a feeling so intense it can even be thought of, in the form of a 'broken heart', as itself a possible cause of death, as with the poignant yearning for her absent son which Anticleia, in the Hades of *Odyssey* 11, tells Odysseus had destroyed her life.¹³

¹³ Hom. *Od.* 11.202; others too feel deep, nostalgic longing for the absent Odysseus: e.g. 1.343 (Penelope, verb), 4.596 (Telemachus, referring to both his parents in an expressive counterfactual), 14.144 (Eumaeus). For early instances of erotic *pothos*, see e.g. Hes. *Op.* 66, [Sc.] 41, Archil. 196 IEG. *Pothos* for the dead: e.g. Callinus 1.18 IEG, Gorg. B6 DK *ad fin.* As it happens, *pothos* was used by the Euripidean *Andromeda* herself to describe her need to sing lamentations with her friends, Eur. fr. 118: this is itself a variation on an old (Homeric) motif of a deep emotional need even for songs of grief; cf. Ch. 2, 63–7.

The way in which Dionysus introduces his *pothos*, then, overlays erotic associations on a basis of 'bereavement'. The point is reinforced by his emphasis on the quasi-physical reaction he had to reading Euripides: 'you can't imagine what a sudden heartfelt pang it caused me', as he puts it (53–4, *ἐξαίφνης πόθος | τὴν καρδίαν ἐπάταξε πῶς οἶμι σφόδρα*). I say 'quasi-physical', since Greek can obviously use *façons de parler* involving internal organs like the *kardia* or *thumos* without making strictly physiological claims about the feelings in question. At the same time, Dionysus' line follows a type of locution, with antecedents as old as Homer, which stresses the sensation of a palpitating heartbeat as a symptom of psychosomatic emotion (of various kinds). One might think here of the Platonic Ion's description of the physical sensations which accompany the thrill of 'fear' aroused by certain Homeric passages, or of Alcibiades' description, in Plato's *Symposium*, of how the ecstatic music of Corybantic rites produces an increased heart-rate and streaming tears in those affected by it.¹⁴ In any case, the impression created by *Frogs* 52–4 (amid the comedy on stage) evokes a sudden access of longing or yearning, and depends on the assumption that poetry itself can be an object of powerful, visceral desire. Not only does this motif parallel ideas applied to the experience of poetry (and, probably, visual art as well) by Gorgias.¹⁵ It is also in tune with a much older Greek sensibility. In archaic texts, song (including, or as well as, music and dance) is standardly thought of as an object/arouser of *himeros*, a word with comparably rich and erotic associations to those of *pothos* and one which Dionysus himself goes on to use, melodramatically, at *Frogs* 59: 'Don't mock me, brother; I'm in a bad way—such is the yearning that's tearing me apart' (*τοιούτος ἡμερός με διαλυμαίνεται*).¹⁶

So Dionysus speaks in the accents of an aching 'lover' of Euripidean tragedy. He does so, of course, in circumstances which never

¹⁴ Pl. *Ion* 535c, *Symp.* 215e, the latter an analogy with the effect that being in Socrates' company has on Alcibiades himself (cf. Ch. 4, 205–6, with Ch. 5, 239–41, on Corybantic music). Other examples include Sappho 31.6 PLG, Thgn. 1199, Ar. *Clouds* 1368.

¹⁵ Gorg. B11.9: see Ch. 6, 274, 279–81. Cf. nn. 47, 54, 60 below.

¹⁶ For *himeros* as a response to song in Homer, see Ch. 2, 46–7, with nn. 16–17 there; cf. e.g. Alcman 27.2 PMG, *Hom. Hymn* 3.185, 4.122, 421–34, 452, 6.13, 10.5, Thgn. 993 (cf. West's text in IEG). *Himeros* and *pothos* are juxtaposed at Pl. *Crat.* 419e–420a (but distinguishing them in terms of present/absent objects of desire), *Symp.* 197d, *Phdr.* 251c–252a.

lose their comic dimensions, either as regards the business on stage or in terms of the situation in which his longing for Euripides overcame him. Reading a tragedy to himself (*πρὸς ἑμᾶυτόν*, 53, emphasizing his personal concentration on the activity, whether or not one takes the reading to be silent) is one thing; reading it on board an Athenian trireme is hard to imagine as anything but unusual, especially when the ship in question, taken over from the fantasy of the preceding lines (47–51), was supposedly on active campaign. Yet the connotations of this image of Dionysus' absorption in reading are elusive: do they make his commitment to Euripides seem all the stronger (the behaviour of someone who seizes every opportunity to indulge his obsession) or just eccentric and weird?¹⁷

Be that as it may, the god's anecdote certainly serves to set up a striking conflict of values with his brother. Heracles, as already mentioned, automatically assumes that Dionysus is talking about *sexual* longing or need; and once the comic potential of that misunderstanding has been exploited, Dionysus turns to the other appetite which he knows Heracles appreciates, the demands of his belly. As avid devotee of tragic drama, Dionysus finds himself having to work hard (and indeed failing) to convince a sceptic that poetry can be an object of urgent, even quasi-physical, desire in its own right. The relative inability of Heracles to take the point, limited as his standards are to the most obvious kinds of bodily exigency, only sharpens its significance. Heracles can reel off the names of tragedians, including Sophocles; but he is cold, it seems, not just towards Euripides but towards tragedy *tout court*.¹⁸ That is clear enough when he talks blithely of 'a myriad tragedians far more *verbose* than Euripides' (91), and then fails to grasp his brother's critical metaphor in calling Euripides a poet 'of fertile creativity' (*γόνιμος*, 96–8), the latter a

¹⁷ For appropriate caution in drawing historical inferences from *Frogs* 52–3, see Mastromarco 2006: 144–6. I am baffled by Ford 2002: 153: 'the picture of Dionysus reading... makes clear that a poetic text is a cultural construct and not a natural object'. Why *would* anyone think a poetic text a 'natural object'? And if anyone did, how would reading a text on a ship prove otherwise? (Would eating an apple on a ship show that an apple is not a natural object?) Del Corno (1994: 224), making a dubious connection with *Frogs* 1114 (nn. 35, 67 below), imprudently infers that reading on ships must have been a familiar enough phenomenon; Wiles (2007: 95–6) takes it as 'clearly preposterous in the context of a military campaign'. Gavrillov 1997: 70 (reasonably) takes Dionysus' reading to be silent.

¹⁸ Notice the possibly cynical nuance of 77, 'if you really *must* bring one of them back' (*εἴπερ ἐκείθεν δεῖ σ' ἄγειν*).

high-flown variant on an old belief that the best poets have a specially endowed and productive 'nature'. And the impression is clinched when he responds to Dionysus' confession that he is 'more than crazy' about Euripides (πλεῖν ἢ μαίνομαι, 103, an ironically apt locution for a god of ecstasy, though probably also a colloquial hyperbole: cf. 751) by saying of Euripidean poetry: 'it's a great big con-trick (κόβαλα), and you know it is' (104).¹⁹

If, at the very start of *Frogs*, Dionysus was caught up in the kind of comedy he professed to loathe, he now finds himself confronted by someone who refuses to share his passion for Euripidean tragedy. But here again Aristophanes makes multiple options available to his audience. Can/should they feel more affinity with the Euripidean 'connoisseur' or with the down-to-earth sceptic (even 'philistine') who has no time for poetic pleasures? And is Dionysus really a 'connoisseur' and Heracles a philistine, or has the former developed an aberrant attachment to a controversial poet (from whom he partially *misquotes* two phrases and a pair of lines (100–2)) while Heracles is to be seen as the bluff, unpretentious type who knows when he is being duped by Euripidean vacuities?²⁰ These are questions which, perhaps in keeping with the ambiguity of Heracles' mythological persona,²¹ Aristophanes allows to flit, so to speak, across the consciousness of his audience, thereby subliminally preparing them for the much more sustained clash of poetic values in the second half of the play. They are not questions we can readily

¹⁹ The adj. *κόβαλος*, in origin perhaps referring to demons of some kind and later extended to knavish trickery, was applied to a persona of the god Dionysus himself: see the complaint of Philoch. *FGrH* 328 F6, with Jacoby ad loc., Pearson 1942: 113. At *Frogs* 1015, Aeschylus will use the same word to characterize the degenerate contemporaries of Euripides. Habash (2000:10) takes Heracles' reaction at 104 as a *donnée* without considering his depiction as cultural philistine/cynic. For a different case and vocabulary of being crazy about tragedy, cf. the young man at *Birds* 1444–5, with Dunbar 1995: 682.

²⁰ Comparable issues arise with the reactions of Euripides' Kinsman to the poetry of Agathon in *Thesm.*: he interrupts Agathon's slave's recital first with verbal raspberries, then with obscenities (39 ff.); later (130 ff.) he characterizes Agathon's lyrics with a touchy-feely somatic assessment of its 'effeminate' tone. It is tempting to see the Kinsman as simply a boorish philistine; but he *might* be perceived by some as having a 'healthily' masculine nose for poetic pretentiousness.

²¹ The ambiguity was extreme. Heracles could be pictured as a good enough kitharist to play for the gods: see e.g. Bond 1981: 238, Schefold 1992: 42–5. Equally, however, he could be thought so bad a pupil that he killed his own music-teacher (Gantz 1993: 378–9) or as a gourmand whose own singing might well be adversely affected by inebriation (e.g. Eur. *Alc.* 760, fr. 907).

resolve by appealing to confident generalizations about Athenian culture, any more than we can do so with the quarrel (which even comes to blows) between the Aeschylean allegiances of Strepsiades and the Euripidean tastes of Pheidippides in *Clouds*.²² There must have been Athenians who could intuitively connect with the idea of feeling a strong, quasi-visceral response towards an exotic (and erotic) play like Euripides' *Andromeda*. Yet there were surely even some who, like Heracles, cared little if at all about tragedy. It is an easy temptation, but one which needs resisting, to suppose that all Athenians had the same degree of attachment to the realm and values of *mousikê*.²³ It is clear, for sure, that *Frogs* as a whole is not a comedy designed for an audience uninterested in tragedy. But the pungency of Dionysus' contretemps with Heracles—the one wishing to be thought of as devoted to the poetic passions of the soul, the other indubitably a utilitarian driven by the demands of the 'lower body'—derives much from the fact that it is framed by a style of comedy whose own mixed allegiances make it impossible to discern any straightforward alignment with either side in the dispute.

This stretch of the opening scene of *Frogs* foreshadows, without giving us a simple handle on, what will become a persistent issue of interpretation in the contest of tragedians in the second half of the play: what does/might/should the audience think of Euripides? I shall emphasize later that the audience which *Frogs* itself seems to look for—as a hypothetical or imaginary cultural entity, not as the sum or average of real individuals' feelings—is *implicated* in the problem of (judging) Euripides. His contemporaneity supposedly makes him 'their' poet in a sense in which Aeschylus is not; that, at any rate, is (comic) Aeschylus' own perspective, just as it will later become Nietzsche's. Yet at the same time Euripides is taken to be intrinsically

²² *Clouds* 1363–78, a passage which demonstrates that the imaginative 'seed' of the contest in *Frogs* was in Aristophanes' mind many years earlier (and reflected plausible shifts of taste between generations of theatre audiences). Cf. Rosen (2006: 32–4) on the dispute in *Clouds* as evidence for the obsessive 'fandom' associated with (and helping to shape) the reputations of different playwrights. For hints of an even earlier Aeschylus–Euripides counterpoint, in *Acharnians*, cf. Platter 2007: 151.

²³ Cf. the choral sentiment at Eur. *HF* 676, 'may I not live without the Muses' (μὴ ζῶην μετ' ἀμουσίας). Plato, regardless of his philosophical agenda, is a useful witness here: he makes Socrates in the *Republic* refer both to fanatical devotees of drama (5.475d) and to those who 'never touch *mousikê*' (3.410c); Socrates also shows anxiety about being taken for a cultural philistine himself (see Ch. 4, 191–2). Further discussion in Halliwell (2012a).

'controversial', the object of a kind of love-hate relationship, for his contemporaries—indeed, in the end, for Dionysus himself. But in the first scene of *Frogs* the possibility of radically opposing views of Euripides is correlated with the divergent personalities of Dionysus and Heracles, thereby producing the impression, as I have suggested, that Euripides is loved by the 'connoisseur' of (tragic) poetry, and loathed by the bluff, no-nonsense philistine. It is certainly Dionysus who appears to triumph in this collision of views by finding the self-confidence to put his brother in his place. 'Don't try to inhabit *my* mind', Dionysus tells him, 'just stick to your own' (105)—before adding, 'I'll take your advice where *food* is concerned' (107). Where poetry is concerned, Dionysus clearly implies, not all 'tastes' are equal; the passionate devotee feels entitled to put the sceptical scoffer in his place. For the (unforewarned) audience of *Frogs*, the moment might seem a self-contained vignette of the values of *mousikê* pitted against those of the belly. But it involves a side of Dionysus' persona whose implications will resurface in enlarged form later in the play. And when they do so, the question of the god's 'critical' judgement, his ability to make sense of the values of tragic *mousikê*, will play a pivotal but unstable role.

EURIPIDES, 'CLOSE READING', AND THE AUDIENCE OF *FROGS*

The second half of *Frogs* returns with a vengeance to the idea of disputes over poetic value. It magnifies the idea from the level of casual, personal disagreement onto the scale of a culturally charged controversy capable of raising issues about the whole character and history of a theatrical genre, including its relationship to the community at whose civic festivals its plays are performed. Aristophanes' audience, itself participating in comedy's own competition at such a festival, is presented with an elaborate, extended set of variations on a theme—the theme of what it means to judge the quality of a poetic work, and what criteria and values are relevant to such judgement. The prelude to the contest (including the reported 'pre-contest', 757–94), in the scene immediately after the parabasis, provides a sort of 'trailer' for what is to follow. In doing so, it introduces some vividly

sketched motifs which have often been seized on by those who discern a coherent poetic-cum-ideological trajectory in *Frogs*. What I would like to stress, however, is that this transitional section of the play, far from giving the audience a ready-made way of understanding the contest, confronts them with a number of comic conundrums.

After the two slaves have shared their 'back-stairs', low-life gossip about their masters, we switch rather abruptly (though the juxtaposition of subject matters partly mirrors the opening scene of the play, as well as reflecting a more general penchant of Aristophanes for mixing registers) to the prospect of a competition for the underworld 'throne of tragedy' (769), a competition between those who lay claim to being exponents of one of the 'great and skilful arts' ([τέχναι] μεγάλαι καὶ δεξιαί, 762). The two opponents are characterized in notably divergent terms. Euripides enters Hades with a piece of display rhetoric, an exhibition of crowd-pleasing demagoguery, for the throngs of criminals and scoundrels down there (771–8), while Aeschylus, though already in possession of the throne, is said to have the support of only a handful of people, 'the best sort' (τὸ χρηστόν, 783). Since this last term was used in the parabasis to denote figures of 'well-born' stock whom the chorus recommended to the city and contrasted with the baseness of its current political leaders, some critics have naturally been keen to correlate the contest with the parabasis in order to read a consistent politico-cultural message in *Frogs* as a whole. This is a dubious enterprise, not only because, as I shall argue in due course, the outcome of the contest will rest on a politically far from robust foundation, but also because the attempt to maintain consistency of political and cultural elitism on the Aeschylean side of the equation, or of political and cultural 'mob rule' on the Euripidean side, runs into intractable difficulties where *Frogs*' own relationship to its mass theatre audience is concerned. In the parabasis, 'choruses and *mousikê*' were picked out, alongside wrestling-schools, as the traditional preserve of an aristocratic style of education, the education of the class from which Aristophanes' chorus recommends the city to choose its political leaders. But how, where 'choruses and *mousikê*' are concerned, could the play as a whole be making a case for cultural elitism, when its own *raison d'être* is tied to performance (with a chorus of non-aristocratic citizens) at civic festivals whose audience is treated as representative of the democratic population as a whole? Whatever the topical political spirit of the parabasis may be, it cannot

provide a simple key to the intricate problems of poetics raised by the contest of tragedians.²⁴

If, against that background, we now return to the account of Euripides' arrival in Hades, an interesting combination of points stands out. First, despite (or, actually, because of) the colourful 'sociology' of Hades, Euripides is presented as *popular*: it is the underworld *dêmos* which clamours for the competition (779). Secondly (and this is too rarely noticed), the reaction of the crowd to Euripides' rhetoric recalls the tone of *Dionysus*' earlier feelings about Euripides. When they heard the playwright's speech, the crowd 'went quite crazy about him (*ὑπερεμάνησαν*, 776) and thought he was brilliantly clever (*σοφώτατον*)', just as Dionysus had originally told Heracles how he was 'more than crazy' about Euripidean poetry (*πλεῖν ἢ μαίνομαι*, 103). Dionysus, it now appears, is far from alone in his passionate enthusiasm for Euripides. But does this make him more or less of a poetic 'connoisseur' than he took himself to be when talking to Heracles? The idea of Euripides' appeal to a theatrical *dêmos* is complicated; it is not easy to move from its comic presentation to a clear picture of cultural actualities. Euripides must have had a fair number of admirers. Not for nothing were his plays selected for performance on numerous occasions over a period of almost half a century. But we know that he won a relatively small number of first prizes and was perceived as a figure of contention during his lifetime. His standing cannot have been black-and-white.²⁵

The reception Euripides receives on his arrival in Hades is comically one-sided, but also potentially ambiguous, in a way which contributes to the polarization and tensions that Aristophanes needs for the later competition. Above all, his alignment with the backing of a mass *dêmos* poses a slippery issue about/for the (hypothetical) audience of *Frogs* itself. If a theatrical *dêmos* exists and is

²⁴ Goldhill (1991: 201–5) makes some shrewd points about the slippery relationship between the parabasis and the contest of *Frogs*. Hubbard (1991: 210) is among those who see the contest as totally attuned to the parabasis. The parabasis itself (esp. 686–705) is, in my view, not so much a piece of authentically authorial 'advice' as an attempt to chime in with what was probably a current, growing wave of sentiment ('bring back the exiles—we need them'), which generated the decree of Patrocleides (Andoc. 1.77–9) later in 405. On the composition of the theatre audience, cf. n. 26 below.

²⁵ The balanced treatment in Stevens (1956) is still fundamental. On the depiction of Euripides' 'popularity' in *Frogs*, cf. Rosen (2004: 310–13).

the basis of Euripides' putative popularity, must the spectators of *Frogs* not collectively belong to it? If so, how could everyone watching *Frogs* exempt himself from the slur that such a *dêmos* is a vulgar mob? To look at it from the other side: if Aeschylus is appreciated by very few, how could the mass audience of *Frogs* think of itself as 'Aeschylean'? It will emerge at more than one stage of the contest that Aeschylus connects Euripides' debasement of tragedy with the debasement of tragedy's *audience*, i.e. with the late fifth-century theatre audience which the spectators of *Frogs* itself presumptively (if, again, hypothetically) represent.²⁶ Later on in this preliminary scene, indeed, we are told that Aeschylus *refused to have the Athenians* (in Hades) as judges of the contest (807).²⁷ So the cultural 'demography' which aligns Euripides with a large but vulgar following teases the contemporary Athenian audience with its own involvement, as it were, in the cause célèbre of Euripides, thereby complicating its relationship to evaluation of tragedy as a whole. Here, then, is a paradox that lies at the (comic) heart of *Frogs*. The play stages the problem of judging tragedy for an audience that is itself projected as collectively incapable of such judgement!

Aristophanes activates these provocative thoughts about Euripides' poetic standing and reputation in a passage where he also broaches more general uncertainties about the evaluation of poetry. With his characteristic fondness for multiplying 'enacted' metaphors (metaphors translated into staged or imagined scenarios), he has already evoked the notion of a poetic contest both as a quasi-political debate in front of a *dêmos* and as a kind of wrestling match (that is the point of the imagery at 791–3). He then adds a further layer: the idea of

²⁶ It would be a radical step to drive a wedge between comic and tragic audiences at this date, even if some spectators might, of course, have preferred one to the other (see *Birds* 786–9 for a joke on this theme, though interpretation is vexed: Dunbar 1995: 480–1). Recently downscaled (though not yet agreed) estimates of the Theatre of Dionysus's capacity to 7,000 or fewer (cf. Revermann 2006a: 168–9, with further literature cited there) resolves little; we would remain in roughly the same zone as with the ecclesia. The comment of Dover 1993: 11 on *Frogs* 771–6 ('Having been told so plainly [*sic*] ... that bad people like Euripides ..., members of the audience are not likely to think that Euripides will win') misses the piquancy (and hyperbole) of the passage for spectators of *Frogs*.

²⁷ Aeschylus' attitude here conceivably echoes a tradition that he had left Athens (for Sicily) in disgruntlement after being defeated by young Sophocles: see Plut. *Cimon* 8.8 (note βαρέως, as at *Frogs* 803); cf. *Vita Aesch.* 332.5–7 Page (1972). But such anecdotes may be post-classical in origin.

weighing and measuring poetic value. When Pluto's anonymous slave says that *mousikê* 'will be weighed in the balance' (797), Xanthias incredulously ripostes, 'what? you mean they're going to weigh tragedy like meat?'; and the first slave underlines the point by anticipating the use of a whole panoply of geometrical and technical apparatus to carry out the task (799–801). These lines treat as absurd any notion of (tragic) poetry as an entity whose qualities can be objectively tested. But if one looks beyond the comic hyperbole of 'mechanizing' poetic judgement, might one not think that the idea of quasi-technical standards is not intrinsically inappropriate? In general terms, after all, the assimilation of good judgement to a sort of scrupulous, rule-applying art of measurement has an older and wider history in Greek thinking;²⁸ and anyone who believed, as many Greeks did, that the standards of poetry are neither indeterminate nor only in the eye of the beholder might be inclined to suppose that they would lend themselves to precise specification. We have already heard poetry referred to several times in this very scene as a *technê* (e.g. 762, 766, 769), a demonstrably skilful activity practised by those who are *sophoi*, expert or knowledgeable in it (e.g. 766, 776, 780).²⁹ But it is

²⁸ See esp. Thgn. 543, judging according to a (metaphorical) ruler/measure (*στάθμη*) and 'set-square' (*γνώμων*); cf. id. 805, 945, and the combination of *σταθμάω* and *κρίνω* at Pl. *Grg.* 465d (with id. *Phlb.* 56b–c for the idea that *technai* which use measuring equipment are of higher value). Note also *ἐπισταθμώμενος* in connection with a deep effort of understanding at Aesch. *Agam.* 164 (Hymn to Zeus). With *Frogs* 799, 956, compare the metaphorical use of *κανών*, a carpenter's rod/ruler, as a reliable measure of value at e.g. Eur. *Hec.* 602, *El.* 52, with LSJ s.v. II for further passages; cf. Pfeiffer (1968: 207) on subsequent metaphorical senses of the word. Later than *Frogs*, note Aeschin. 3.199–200 for an analogy between a good law (against illegal proposals) and the application of a carpenter's *κανών*: Aeschines equates justice with an art of determinate measurement; cf. Arist. *Rh.* 1.1, 1354a24–6 (but with *Eth. Nic.* 5.10, 1137b29–30, quoted as epigraph to this chapter, for a different use of the same metaphor). More generally, the common Greek vocabulary of 'straight' (*ἰθύς*, *ὀρθός*) judgement is a (dead) metaphor from activity involving careful physical alignment; see e.g. Hes. *Theog.* 86, with West (1966) 183–4.

²⁹ *σοφός* is used repeatedly in the play to mean (poetically) masterful, expert, etc., but with no specification of what qualifies as poetic *sophia* (i.e. what the poet 'knows'): that is what the contest is *trying* to establish, grappling with a mixture of technical factors and more intangible considerations of human insight or wisdom; compare the way in which the term wavers between those two things at Pl. *Ap.* 22b–d (with Ch. 4, 159–66). Only at *Frogs* 1108 (coupled with *λεπτός*, cf. n. 66 below) and 1118 (where, applied to the audience, it picks up the connotations of 'bookish', *recherché* ingenuity in *δεξιότης* at 1114; cf. n. 50 below) is *sophos* given a particular slant, in both cases somewhat *à la* Euripides. Line 1413 (141 below), whichever way it might be interpreted, only reinforces, without helping to settle, the problem of what makes a poet

part-and-parcel of being a *technê* to have publicly certifiable standards of proficiency and success: imagine ship-building, architecture, medicine, or animal-breeding without the possibility of testable credentials of competence. So if tragedy is supposed to be a poetic *technê* (and, regardless of the word itself, the underlying idea is not a new one in Greek culture),³⁰ yet at the same time it seems ludicrous to think of taking precisely calibrated 'measure' or 'weight' of its value, how *are* its qualities to be judged?

The force of this implicit question is given further twists. In the first place, Pluto's slave explains to Xanthias that measuring equipment will be employed because Euripides has insisted he will test and scrutinize the texts of tragedy 'verse by verse' and/or 'word for word', *κατ' ἔπος* (802). So it seems as though it is specifically Euripides who advocates a technical, verbally meticulous method of criticism, while Aeschylus is said to have reacted to his opponent's insistence with a bull-like look of animal aggression (*ταυρηδόν*, 804). One catches a hint here, reinforced in the following stasimon (814–29, where Aeschylus is imagined in a manic frenzy, 816), of a contrast between a rationalist-intellectualist and a more rawly intuitionist conception of poetic creativity (and value).³¹ Certainly the idea of verbally precise scrutiny is consistently associated with Euripides: the same phrase, *κατ' ἔπος*, will occur twice more in the course of the contest itself, both times repudiated by Aeschylus (1198, 1407). Outside *Frogs*, the phrase is surprisingly rare but is found in the Derveni

sophos. See further in nn. 38, 50, 87 below, with Dover 1974: 119–22 for a survey of *sophos* terms more generally. Note Pl. *Resp.* 8.568a–b (notwithstanding Socrates' sarcasm) for a general characterization of tragedy as *sophos*; cf. Ch. 4, 178 n. 41, for further Platonic usage.

³⁰ Recognition of specialized 'poetic' expertise (in a bard's storytelling) is implied by *ἐπισταμένως* at Hom. *Od.* 11.368 (cf. Ch. 2, 54–5); poetry is a knowledge-based *σοφία* (as well as a gift of the Muses) at Solon 13.52 *IEG* (n. 52 below), and *technê* terms are applied to the musico-poetic arts by at least the early 5th cent. (Hom. *Hymn* 4. 447, 483, 511, Pind. *Pae.* 9.39). Cf. Murray 1981: 98–9.

³¹ Note Aeschylus' (reported) reference to the 'nature' of poets (*φύσεις ποιητῶν*), 810; cf. Ar. *Thesm.* 167 (with n. 41 below). Lada-Richards (1999: 242–7) offers a reading of Aeschylus in *Frogs* as an 'inspired' poet; but cf. n. 95 below. The clash between 'technical' and 'intuitionist' conceptions of poetic talent (see Arist. *Poet.* 8.1451a24 for the explicit contrast) is already implicit in Phemius' self-image at Hom. *Od.* 22.347–8 (Ch. 2 n. 39); cf. naturalist conceptions of inspiration in Democritus and Plato, Ch. 4 n. 25. With Aeschylus' bull-like face at *Frogs* 804, compare Socrates' ironic look at Pl. *Phdo* 117b: see Halliwell 2008: 282 with n. 40 there; cf. Bowie 1993: 246–7 for other features of Aeschylean 'monstrosity'.

papyrus as a marker of the 'close reading' and specialized exegesis which the author of that work undertakes on his allegorical Orphic texts.³² The Derveni author, however, is hardly just a rationalizing intellectual; he is (also) surely a believer in an esoteric creed, and his hermeneutics of verbal detail is predicated on the cryptically encoded meanings which he ascribes to his texts. So although the image of Euripides at *Frogs* 801–2 does suggest an alignment with 'technical' criticism, close reading is not intrinsically rationalist: it could be adapted to more than one set of values.

We need in any case to be alert to the anomalies built into this aspect of the play. For one thing, Aeschylus may deprecate 'verse for verse' scrutiny of poetic language, but he will engage in just as much of it (or just as little of it) as his opponent—one of several respects in which the contest will toy with discrepancies between critical principle and practice. Moreover, the supposition, not uncommon among critics of *Frogs*, that close verbal analysis should be taken as the preserve of intellectuals falls foul of the consideration that appreciation of the contest as a whole partly *depends* on a willingness to be interested in, as well as an ability to follow, the operations of detailed arguments about words: anyone wholly averse to such things (remember Heracles!) would quickly be stupefied or baffled by *Frogs*. As in other regards, Aristophanes' treatment of his subject is itself poetically entangled with the issues it raises.³³

But there is a more general observation worth stressing here. Close attention *per se* to details of language can hardly have been an entirely new feature of Greek responses to song and poetry in the fifth century. Greece's centuries-old song culture entailed that considerable numbers of people learnt to sing, recite, and even dance verbally elaborate poetic texts, something impossible without attention to details of diction, phrasing, and rhythm. Learning a poem is not, of course, the same thing as actively analysing its components; but, equally, there is no clear dividing-line between the alertness to detail that might be cultivated by sensitive responsiveness (needed even by those who only listen appreciatively) and the possibilities of more formally organized analysis. Nor does the notion of close analysis

³² Derveni papyrus 13.6: text in Betegh 2004: 28, Kouremenos *et al.* 2006: 87 (with 194–5 for discussion).

³³ Scharffenberger (2007) brings out this side of the play strongly in relation to the persona of Aeschylus.

absolutely require access to written texts; it can in principle be pursued orally, a point dramatized in the well-known Simonides section of Plato's *Protagoras*. Oral analysis must have been familiar enough in a culture in which individuals habitually exchanged and learnt quotations by word of mouth, or in which, to cite a germane practice, political and forensic audiences could be expected to scrutinize even small details of official documents read out to them.³⁴ The importance of verbal criticism in *Frogs* (whose own audience in 405 was certainly listening and watching, not reading) is not primarily a matter of literate versus oral experience of poetry.³⁵ It has much more to do with disputes over how the values of poetry are to be identified, demarcated, and assessed.

The final twist given to the problem of poetic value in the prelude to the contest occurs when Xanthias follows up the other slave's description of the measuring/weighing equipment that is being prepared (and which presupposes, however parodically, that poetic qualities might be objectively determined) by asking emphatically, 'But who's going to *judge* these things?'³⁶ Xanthias picks up the inescapably agonistic implications of the situation, implications already

³⁴ Aeschin. 3.192, referring to the late 5th and early 4th cent., speaks of Athenian citizens insisting on repeated readings of laws in order to ascertain whether even a 'single syllable' had been contravened; Dem. 24.70 is similar. These passages (to which I was alerted by Victoria Wohl) attest the verbal attentiveness of which Athenian audiences could be thought capable; cf. Dem. 20.94 on close scrutiny of recited laws. This feature of democracy is pertinent to *Frogs*' depiction of 'forensic' Euripides (n. 68 below) who encourages Athenians to cultivate habits of argumentative reflection and scrutiny (971–9).

³⁵ The famous but vexed reference to spectators and books at *Frogs* 1114 (see n. 67 below) does not really contradict this claim: it is not a neutral observation but a comic exaggeration of a (growing) culture of 'book learning' (associated with Euripides himself at 943, 1409); cf. Eur. *Hipp.* 451–2 for an anachronistic reference to poetic texts in Euripides' own work. Many Athenians would have experienced verbal analysis of poetry in oral form as part of their education: cf. the comic glimpse of this (involving Homeric words) in Ar. fr. 233, with Olson 2007: 163–4. Note that *Frogs* 153 probably presupposes the practice of copying out extracts from works to learn them by heart (cf. Pl. *Phdr.* 228a–b). On the complex mixture of orality and literacy in Athenian culture, see Thomas 1989: 15–24, Morgan 1999. On the general implications for *Frogs*, note the caution of Hunter 2009: 24–5. Wiles (2007: 96) imposes on *Frogs* a false dichotomy between plays as performance and text; Wright (2009: 165) mistakenly claims that the "textual" conception of drama is completely lost sight of in the contest.

³⁶ *Frogs* 805: the emphasis in my tr. matches the postponed interrogative in Greek; cf. Denniston 1954: 259, with further examples, and Thomson 1939: esp. 150, for the principle of postponement.

present in the other slave's earlier reference to 'a contest and judgement' (785, cf. 873) and rooted in long-established Greek traditions of musical and poetic competition. Whatever 'equipment' may be used, whatever technical analysis, a final act of adjudication will still be needed. There is a gap to be bridged, that is to say, between methodology and evaluation, between procedure and verdict: a gap which, to Athenian minds, might have seemed comparable to the one involved in a legal trial (where no amount of evidence or 'proof' could pre-empt an act of decision-making), but radically different from, for instance, a race or a wrestling bout (in which clear-cut conditions of victory could be stipulated). As it happens, the contest of tragedians will from time to time evoke *both* these types of competition (and others besides), fluctuating, as it were, between the connotations of rule-bound and more 'qualitative' kinds of antagonism.³⁷ But it cannot escape the force of Xanthias' question: who is to make the ultimate judgement of poetic value? Whose authority is to count? Who has the 'expertise' (*sophia*) to judge the expertise of the poets themselves?³⁸ Once we are told (810–11) that it is Dionysus himself, the lover of Euripides, the problem of judging poetic value is translated from the abstract into the highly personal: the judge, the 'critic' himself, becomes a dramatic embodiment of the problem in question. We are bound to wonder what kind of standards, let alone impartiality, can be expected from that committed but impulsive figure whose unpredictable (and cowardly) antics were amply displayed during his journey down to Hades. And we might also instinctively wonder whether he is a judge who will know how to do more justice to tragedy or to comedy.

³⁷ The contest's strands of imagery include wrestling (775, *λυγισμῶν*, 878), racing (995), cockfighting (861), sailing (999–1003), and quasi-judicial cross-examination (*ἐλεγχος*: 786, 857, etc.: n. 68 below). In Athenian dramatic festivals, decisions depended on a combination of evaluation (by individual judges) and rules (the procedures for counting votes): on the latter's complexities, see Marshall and van Willigenburg (2004). On older traditions of poetic competition in Greece, see e.g. Griffith (1990); cf. Wright (2009).

³⁸ See 806 for the implication that the judge of poetry, like the poet himself, needs to be *σοφός*. Aristophanes' chorus had already used the term of the audience of *Frogs* itself at 700 (cf. 676); likewise *Clouds* 575 (cf. 526, 535, with implied restrictions), *Eccl.* 1155. See further at 131–3 below. Cf. Wright 2009: 156–7 on some of the ironies of judging (qua prize-giving) in *Frogs*.

ANALYSIS, EVALUATION, AND
INCOMMENSURABILITY

The contest of tragedians in *Frogs* is one of the most richly textured pieces of writing in the surviving plays of Aristophanes. No interpretation can be more than selective; and no interpretation which is fully open to the dazzling dialectic of poetic cut and thrust should aspire to be more than tentative in its larger conclusions. My own angle of approach in what follows will be linked to an attempt to chart Dionysus' path from the position of a judge who wants to be seen as a cultivated connoisseur of tragic poetry (he prays at the outset for the ability to judge the competition 'with great finesse' or 'in the most cultured manner', *μουσικώτατα*, 873) to that of someone whose need to find a definitive means of adjudication between the playwrights is frustrated by the profusion of possible conceptions and criteria of poetic value. Dionysus' experience is undoubtedly comic in its fluctuations and bewilderment, but it is also arguably an authentic reflection of the situation of a spectator of tragedy who finds that his responses to various features of the genre are irreducible to a systematic poetics.

We should start by reminding ourselves that the contest operates throughout on at least two simultaneous and interacting levels. One is the overt 'agenda' of the debate: the sequence of critical topics and disputes (relating to prologues, lyrics, diction, characters, etc.) by means of which the domain of tragedy is mapped out and through which the competition advances in search of its clinching verdict. The other is that of the authorial personae hypostasized from the plays and projected onto their creators—personae which possess, among other things, subtle overtones of the Homeric contrast between Achilles (archetype for the portentous, brooding, angry, mysterious Aeschylus) and Odysseus (archetype for the shift, rhetorical, cunning, voluble Euripides).³⁹ The presentation of this quasi-mythologized opposition generates a head-to-head clash of temperaments which not only is

³⁹ The Achillean associations of Aeschylus are overt at 912, 992, 1264 (the reference at 1400 is Euripidean and serves a different purpose), implicit at 1020. It is hard to pin down specific Odyssean allusions in the treatment of Euripides, but cf. the craftiness of 957–8, with Hunter 2009: 45. A further dimension of the difference between the poets (and their styles)—'monologic' Aeschylus versus 'dialogic' Euripides—is brought out by Rosen (2008).

theatrically productive in its own right but functions as a vivid embodiment of poetic-cum-critical differences. Even when the dramatists are exchanging what is at times the crudest *ad hominem* insults (Dionysus warns them at an early stage about swapping abuse, *loidoria*, like female bread-sellers in the market-place, 857–8), they throw into stark relief the difficulty of harmonizing discordant standards of judgement. At the same time, their authorial personae are a comic orientation, or perhaps a turning inside out, of one kind of critical perspective, the perspective of a 'biographical' poetics: the kind of criticism, that is to say, which takes poems to be imprinted with the qualities of their makers' minds, and which therefore supposes it legitimate to reconstruct the 'life' of a poet from the contents of his poems.

This biographico-poetic method allows the haughty, withdrawn, pensive temperament of Aeschylus to be traced in the brooding silences of some of his characters, and posits a comparable match between the intellectually disputatious Euripides and the argumentatively trenchant rhetoric used in his plays. The method comes under (comic) strain, however: if followed through without modification, it would lead us to take Aeschylus to be *both* a brooding, taciturn type *and* a thunderingly brash, overpowering figure⁴⁰—not an impossible perception, perhaps, of an inconsistent or impetuous individual (the Achillean paradigm, already noted, has some relevance here), but much easier to make sense of as a trope for the complexities of whole poetic works, whose conditions of unity are rather different from those of human characters. It is difficult to tell how widespread 'biographical' inferences about tragedians or any other poets were in late fifth-century Athens, though we do know that they became common practice from at least the fourth century onwards.⁴¹ It might even be argued, at one extreme, that in *Frogs* (as also in the

⁴⁰ Note the irony at 1132–4, when Dionysus urges Aeschylus to remain silent even though he is evidently bursting to speak; good actors might find a way to play on the earlier theme of silences. On different grounds, Euripides himself at some point acquired a reputation for anti-social moroseness: see Alexander *Aet. fr. 7 CA*, with Halliwell 2008: 270 and n. 16 there. As regards 'thunder', the metaphor was already associated with vehement public rhetoric: *Ar. Kn.* 626, cf. *Ach.* 531 with Olson 2002: 211–12, O'Sullivan 1992: 107–14; see Scharffenberger (2007) for Aeschylus in *Frogs* as 'demagogic' in this and related respects. Among later uses, cf. the irony of Callim. *Aet. fr.* 1.20 Pfeiffer/Massimilla, with Fantuzzi and Hunter 2004: 69–70, and the Longinian 'thunder(bolt)' of the sublime (*Ch.* 7, 330–35 with n. 9 there).

⁴¹ *Ar. Thesm.* 159–70 toys with the idea of a link between the lives and works of poets (cf. *Ar. fr.* 694): cf. Paduano (1996), making comparison with Arist. *Poet.*

Euripides scenes of *Acharnians* and *Thesmophoriazusae*, as well as the Agathon scene of the latter) the biographico-poetic principle is an *invention* of comedy. But this is not a question I want to pursue here. It is sufficient for my purposes to stress that the workings of the principle in *Frogs* add palpable accentuation to a staging of conflict between poetic values themselves.

To see how the problem of clashing values is given dramatic life by Aristophanes, it is useful to focus first on the epirrhetic syzygy of the agon proper, i.e. the symmetrically organized structure of choral songs and recitative speeches by the adversaries at 895–1098. Aristophanes uses this comic structure as a vehicle for various effects in eight of his surviving eleven plays. In three (some would say four) of these cases he actually employs the full-blown form twice over, and in others we find looser versions of the epirrhetic pattern.⁴² But *Frogs* is exceptional in using the full structure in a manner which produces an inconclusive result: in all other seven cases where the full epirrhetic form occurs, a victory or at least evident advantage is achieved by one of the parties to the dispute.⁴³ In *Frogs*, not only is no verdict delivered or any clear outcome reached at the end of the agon (a fact underlined by the chorus's following song, in which they pronounce, 'it's a tall order to decide between them', χαλεπὸν οὖν ἔργον διαίρειν (1100), and anticipate the prospect of many further stages of the contest), but the progress of the agon as a whole has an unstable dynamic which is hard to parallel elsewhere. There is a conspicuous lack of the directional impetus present in, for instance, the worsting of the Paphlagonian by the Sausage-Seller in *Knights*, the defeat of the

4.1448b24–8, Austin and Olson 2004: 109–114. For the development of (pseudo-) biography of poets in antiquity, see Lefkowitz 1981, 1991: 113–26.

⁴² The fundamental treatment remains Gelzer (1960), though of his twelve main instances (11–36) two (*Eccl.*, *Plutus*) are extended half-agon, and two others (*Wasps* 334–402, *Birds* 327–99) are not fully developed as set-piece debates. For an overview in English, see Pickard-Cambridge 1962: 194–207; cf. the table in Lowe 2007: 57 (though the line numbers for *Birds* and *Lys.* are incorrect: see next note).

⁴³ For the other seven instances (cf. the previous note), see *Kn.* 303–460 (Paphlagonian physically routed at the end), *Kn.* 756–940 (Demos persuaded of the Sausage-Seller's superiority), *Clouds* 949–1104 (Just Argument defeated and routed), *Clouds* 1345–1451 (Strepsiades defeated by his son), *Wasps* 526–724 (Bdelycleon clearly outargues Philocleon, though the latter's capitulation is delayed into the following scene), *Birds* 451–626 (Peisetairios persuades the birds), *Lys.* 467–607 (Lysistrata demolishes the Commissioner, who is physically humiliated at the end). A decisive outcome is also true of the two half-agon at *Eccl.* 571–709 (Praxagora persuades the men) and *Plutus* 487–616 (Poverty defeated and driven away).

Just by the Unjust Argument in *Clouds*, or the humiliation of the Commissioner by the heroine in *Lysistrata*. Three principal factors operate together (though hardly in unison) to produce the inconclusiveness and undecidability of the formal agon in *Frogs*. One is a sense of how polarization entails incommensurability in the expectations and criteria brought to bear on the two poets' work. The second is the asymmetrical relationship in which the two contestants stand to the audience of *Frogs*. And the third is the capricious character of Dionysus himself.

Incommensurability insinuates itself from the outset of the agon; it is closely tied up with the (pseudo-)biographically caricatured personae of the playwrights themselves. Let me draw out this point initially with some knotty verbal details of a kind which exemplify a more general feature of the densely composed fabric of Aristophanes' text. In keeping with the even-handed stance which the chorus adopt for most of the debate (and to which I shall return), the first song of the agon (i.e. the strophe) starts by calling both poets skilled or expert practitioners (*sophoi*, 896a) who have equal 'pride' (*λήμα*) in their work. But it then proceeds to pit the smooth-talking, carefully polished language/personality of Euripides against the tree-uprooting storm force and the sheer animal energy (like a horse rolling over vigorously and raising clouds of dust) which symbolize Aeschylus.

προσδοκᾶν οὖν εἰκός ἐστι
τὸν μὲν ἀστεῖόν τι λέξειν
καὶ κατερρηνημένον,
τὸν δ' ἀνασπώντ' αὐτοπρέμνοις
τοῖς λόγοισιν ἐμπεσόντα
συσκεδᾶν πολλὰς ἀλινδῆθρας ἐπών. (901–4)

So we have every right to expect
that one of them will have some elegant
and well-honed things to say,
while the other will tear up words by the roots,
fall upon his foes with them,
and scatter whole paddocksful of word-dust to the winds.⁴⁴

There are imagistic connections here with an earlier choral song whose text has taxed editors to the limits. At line 819 we seem to have a metaphor of (possibly screeching, possibly splintering) chariot

⁴⁴ Tr. from Sommerstein 1996: 109.

axles set alongside something to do with the chiselling of a craftsman, within a strophe which certainly superimposes technological vocabulary onto quasi-epic images of rampaging warriors. Dover emends the text of 819 to produce what one might think is tenuously intelligible ('slivers of linchpins' juxtaposed with 'parings of works of art'); Sommerstein despairingly inserts the daggers of irremediable textual corruption round part of the line; while Denniston questions whether the imagery *need* make proper sense at all.⁴⁵ Even if the textual issues could be fully resolved, I suggest that at 819 as at 901–4 we would still be left with a bewilderingly incongruous convolution of imagery, a parasyaesthetic intersection of impressions (with words wearing plumed helmets, riding horses, but also becoming wrought objects of wood and stone). This is not just a matter of the kind of metaphorical complexity found in several types of Greek poetry (not least in the plays of Aeschylus), but a comic means of throwing the opposing poetic extremes of the contest into a confused *mêlée* of connotations, and thereby destabilizing the prospects of judging coherently between them.

At line 901 the verb *καταρριεῖν* (or *καταρριᾶν*) must mean 'to file down'; the chorus expect Euripides to say something 'polished to a finish'. The word seems to evoke the work of a sculptor in either metal or stone (just as the 'shavings', *σμιλεύματα*, at 819, if that is what they are, may make reference to the chisellings of such a craftsman); this is the earliest occurrence of a type of metaphor which we find later in antiquity, not least in Latin, to denote stylistic smoothness, finish, or polish.⁴⁶ But while a number of scholars have picked up this terminology and treated Aristophanes as a 'source' for the evolution of critical language, insufficient attention has been paid to the immediate impact of its appearance in *Frogs* itself. Whether or not Aristophanes is borrowing or inventing terminology (and we often simply cannot tell), my contention is that in a passage like 900–4 he is mixing

⁴⁵ The fullest discussion of the imagery, with a partly strained interpretation, is Taillardat 1965: 289–92, 295, followed by O'Sullivan 1992: 141–2 (stressing the vocabulary of *sounds* associated with Euripides' subtle style). Denniston's view in MS. (cf. Denniston 1927: 114) is cited by Dover (1993: 293), who ignores Taillardat. Cf. Beta 2004: 138–9, Silk 2000a: 198 ('welter of imagery'), and see the app. crit. in Wilson 2007a: ii. 172, with Wilson 2007b: 173.

⁴⁶ For the history of such tropes, including reference to *Frogs* 901 (and 819), see Friis Johansen and Whittle 1980: iii. 103, Alexis fr. 223.8, with Arnott 1996: 637–8, Taillardat 1965: 295, 450, Brink 1971: 321 (on Hor. *Ars P.* 291), Pritchett 1975: 89, van Hook 1905: 39, O'Sullivan 1992: 140 n. 216. For further analysis of *Frogs* 900–4, cf. Bonanno (1998).

(metaphorical) categories with an extravagance which highlights the incommensurability of different kinds of poetic quality. How can one even compare, let alone judge between, the refined smoothness of polished sculpture and the ravaging forces of storms or animal energy? The subtext of such contrasts, which pervade the second half of the play, is not unrelated to a much older Greek (and probably Indo-European) polarity in the explanation and evaluation of song: a polarity between natural (i.e. unlearned and unteachable) 'creativity', which may sometimes be ascribed to 'inspiration', and, on the other hand, practised craft or technically advanced proficiency. But Aristophanes stretches and overloads these contrasts, with all the comic excesses of language available to him, to the point where they no longer promote an instructive dialectic of comparison. Instead, they confound any scope for consistent judgement by plunging us into a gulf of disparity between Aeschylean and Euripidean styles of poetry.

It is not just the choral strophe at the start of the agon which conveys the difficulty of trying to contain such divergent poetic styles and qualities within a single framework of judgement. The same effect is cumulatively built up by the exchanges of the poets themselves, exchanges which also bring into play the other two factors I mentioned above: the playwrights' asymmetrical relationship to the audience, and the instability of Dionysus' judgement. In putting his case in the first half of the agon, Euripides accuses Aeschylus of portentous posturing (epitomized by the long, brooding silences of characters like Achilles and Niobe), stringing out excessively long sequences of choral lyrics, and using language of a monstrously unintelligible kind. He claims that he himself, by contrast, 'slimmed down' tragedy, removing baroque bombast and replacing it with lighter language and informative prologues; that he developed a 'democratic', populist mode of characterization in which all kinds of person, including women and slaves, could contribute eloquently; that he injected analytical reasoning (*logismos*) into his poetic art;⁴⁷ and that he thereby taught his audience how to talk, think, and scrutinize their own lives, in the process bringing 'domestic' or

⁴⁷ With *λογισμὸν ἐνθεὶς τῇ τέχνῃ* (973), which could mean rationalizing his poetic creativity and/or making his characters engage in reasoning, compare Gorg. (*Helen*) B11.2, *λογισμὸν τινα πῶ λόγῳ δούς* (see Ch. 6, 268–72): the parallel (neglected by commentators on Aristophanes) highlights the rationalist-'sophistic' strand in the characterization of Euripides, but it complicates any attempt to see a major Gorgianic influence on the contest as a whole; cf. n. 54 below.

ordinary affairs on stage to replace the mythologically remote paraphernalia of Aeschylean drama.

Euripides' case is a congeries of arguments (stylistic, dramaturgical, cultural) which lumps together the broadly plausible (Aeschylean lyrics were certainly more extensive than those of Euripides) with the rather dubious (it is far from straightforward that women and slaves have more of a voice in Euripides than in Aeschylus). But in so far as his case has an overall thrust it involves a preference for a dramatic atmosphere tinged by 'contemporary realism' over one heavy with 'mythological grandeur'. That is a preference which Euripides links to the putative influence of his plays on Athenian spectators and to their capacity to judge the world of those plays from their own experience (959–61). It therefore places the (hypothetical) audience of *Frogs* in a far from neutral relationship to the contest, as the second half of the agon will ironically confirm.

Dionysus himself mirrors, as well as adding to, the sense of critical disequilibrium. He shows an inclination to support Euripides' case at four points (914, 921, 926–7, 930–2), to approve of Aeschylus strongly on only one occasion (916–17, immediately undercut at 918 and 921–2), to make one direct gibe at Euripides (on biographically allusive grounds, 952–3), and to interject several other remarks (918, 934, 968–70, with the long tail-piece at 980–91) which are caught, or oscillate, between irony and buffoonery in a manner hard to reduce to a clear verdict on the balance of the argument. In addition, he is bluntly accused of stupidity by both poets (917–18, 933), hardly a ringing endorsement of his credentials as judge. That catalogue of references is just a convenient way of summarizing the predominant leaning of Dionysus towards Euripides' side, but also his evident *volatility*. This volatility functions in part as a comic index of the difficulty of holding a fixed focus on poetic and theatrical values.

At 914–21, for instance, Dionysus (speaking in effect with the voice of a previous generation of theatre audience) starts by avowing that he derived a passionate thrill from Aeschylean silences, reinforcing his point with a sidelong swipe at the 'loquacious' characters (*οἱ λαλοῦντες*, 917) of current tragedy, a swipe which has a bearing on Euripides himself.⁴⁸ But under attack from Euripides' taunt of naivety

⁴⁸ With Dionysus' use of the verb *λαλεῖν* (917, cf. 815, 839, 954, 1069, 1492), recall Heracles' use of the cognate adj. at 91 to convey contempt for tragic poetry *tout court* (103 above). See O'Sullivan 1992: 132–4, Dover 1993: 22.

('That's because you were gullible (ῥήλιθιος)', 917) he rapidly pulls back ('Yes, I think so too') and concedes he was duped by the empty pretences of Aeschylean dramaturgy. In the rapid shifts of this exchange, there is a comic vignette not just of contradictory experiences of the same theatrical device (a character's prolonged silence perceived as either a means of accumulating highly charged expectation or as a contrived *coup de théâtre*), but also, implicitly, of how uncertainty about the value of a poetic experience can even become *internalized* in an individual mind. In changing his views under the pressure of Euripides' withering scorn (in marked contrast, recall, to the self-confidence he earlier displayed in reaction to Heracles' scepticism), Dionysus may be fulfilling the requirements of a comic stooge. But his volatility is also subtly (and ominously) indicative of the problem he has in finding a firm standpoint from which to adjudicate the clashing values of the contest.

In the second half of the agon—after the chorus, we should note, has lent some weight in its antistrophe to the seriousness of Euripides' accusations ('grave charges he has made', 996) and has addressed the older poet with a sting of ambivalence in the tail ('you who built a tower of solemn words and made a beautiful structure of tragic drivel', 1004–5)⁴⁹—Aeschylus to a considerable extent re-employs the kind of dichotomy set up by Euripides in the first half of the debate. He evaluatively reverses its priorities, however, by claiming that his adversary has stripped tragedy of all its heroic grandeur and elevation, reducing it to a world of base crudity and sordid immorality whose influence is discernible in the widespread degeneracy of 'modern' Athenian life. So the agon foregrounds a particular kind of critical impasse: the two sides seem virtually to acknowledge the same poetic phenomena yet offer diametrically opposed and equally uncompromising assessments of their importance.

Before Aeschylus launches into his counter-attack, he famously invites Euripides to declare his fundamental criteria of poetic value,

⁴⁹ Dover (1993: 317–18), ignoring the same vocabulary at 923 (cf. 945), strangely resists the prima-facie reference of ῥήπος, 'drivel' (1005), to Aeschylus' own poetry; Wilson (2007b: 177) misses the comic tone (and Wilson 2007a: ii. 180 erroneously ascribes the lines to Dionysus). Silk (2000a: 48) robs the sentence of its comic point by quoting the first part without the second. For the type of comic oxymoron involved at 1004–5, *Clouds* 359 is a good parallel. Paduano, in Paduano and Grilli 1996: 151, unjustifiably translates ῥήπος merely as 'linguaggio', Lefkowitz 1981: 70 bafflingly translates as 'lyre'! Cf. n. 100 below.

and receives the answer: (one should admire a poet for) 'virtuosity (*dexiotês*) and moral instruction (*nouthesia*), and [*sic*] because we improve the people in our cities' (1009–10).⁵⁰ As with many other details of *Frogs*, however, this passage—which is not an independent 'key' to the play but a comic depiction of the kind of thing that might be thought appropriate for a generalized poetic credo—has too often been read mainly as a reflection of (and 'source' for) contemporary views. Its ambiguous force as a rhetorical moment in the competition itself has not been sufficiently recognized, in part because it is easy to overlook the absence of any genre-specific component in the proposed criteria. There is no doubt that artistic virtuosity and (ethical) instruction or edification were established bases of poetic value, both of them rooted in older Greek traditions of thought.⁵¹ Individual texts sometimes encapsulate one or other of these ideas, though without thereby affirming an exclusive choice between them. Solon, for instance, mixing a vocabulary of what sounds like formalized expertise with a claim to a kind of erotic loveliness, describes the good poet as one who 'knows the measure of a lovely skill';⁵² the author of a fragmentary treatise probably close in date to *Frogs* tells us, on the other hand, 'I have heard many assert that it is beneficial (*ὠφέλιμον*)

⁵⁰ Note the close connection between *νουθετεῖν* and *διδάσκειν* at Pl. *Prt.* 325c, with *Prt.* 326a for poetic *νουθετήσεις* and Isoc. 2.42 (cf. 49) for a comparison of poetry to personal advice. For poetry 'improving' or making people 'better', cf. Isoc. 2.3, with Ch. 6, 287, 311; on the term 'beneficial', *ὠφέλιμος*, which Aeschylus introduces at 1031, see Ch. 6, 310–14. 'Making better', 'teaching', and being 'beneficial' are all (approximately) equated at Xen. *Symp.* 3.4–5. As regards 'virtuosity', *δεξιός* is sometimes virtually synonymous with *σοφός*, as in effect at *Frogs* 1114/1118 (matching poetry and audience); cf. e.g. Ar. *Clouds* 547–8 with 520 (claimed by the comedian himself; note *Clouds* 521, 526–7 for the audience), *Wasps* 65–6. For a broad alignment between *δεξιός* and *technê*, note *Frogs* 762. See Dover (1993: 12–14) for an interesting discussion of *δεξιότης* and *σοφία* in *Frogs*, but his inference that the former is an 'ingredient' of the latter privileges the formal statement at 1009–10 over the cumulative impression of the contest that poetic *σοφία* cannot be analytically defined. Cf. nn. 29, 87.

⁵¹ Pace Bakola 2008: 8 with n. 32, influenced by Ford 2002: 200 (who ignores the fact that Aeschylus does not *challenge* Euripides' criteria), there is no good reason to see *Frogs* 1009–10 (not 1008–9) as embodying an opposition between 'old' and 'new' criteria of poetic value; sophistic attitudes to poetry are more complex than Bakola 2008: 9 suggests. The (superficial) agreement between the poets indicates, in a sense, the broadness of the criteria; cf. Silk 2000a: 367. Pucci (2007: 114–17) sees the seriousness of Aeschylus' question and Euripides' answer as comically dissolved into emptiness.

⁵² *ἡμερτῆς σοφίης μέτρον ἐπιστάμενος*, Solon 13.52 IEG, with n. 30 above; cf. Mülke 2002: 305–6. On the erotic overtones of *ἡμερτός*, cf. Ch. 2, 46–7.

to keep the company of the poems bequeathed by our ancestors...'⁵³ The ready currency of such ideas is certainly one reason why Aristophanes can make Euripides and Aeschylus appear to agree at the level of principle. But this ostensible agreement, which Aeschylus will exploit to mount an attack on the immorality and 'therefore' the (supposedly) corrupting influence of Euripidean characters, actually does little to advance the debate. It only adds further layers of complication (and confusion) to what is at stake.

In the first place, it is here as much as anywhere that the audience of *Frogs* is itself ironically implicated in the issues, since Aeschylus' case depends on the assertion that Athenians collectively have declined into a population of cowards and good-for-nothings, lacking the military, athletic virtues of their forebears (1014–15, 1069–70). *Frogs* consequently makes it hard for its own (hypothetical) audience to see or feel Aeschylus as in the right without implicitly condemning itself. Furthermore, although Aeschylus seems confident that the moral line of attack favours him, he runs into some trouble with it. His attempt to claim credit for producing a generation of obsessively warlike Athenians ('breathing spears, javelins, white-crested helmets etc.', 1016) meets with robust scepticism from Euripides: 'what exactly did *you* do to teach them to be so noble?' (1019). The following line, in which Dionysus has to urge Aeschylus not to slump into one of 'his' brooding silences, shows that the older playwright is disinclined to answer the question: a gesture, it seems, of haughty reluctance to come down to Euripides' level of disputation (cf. the earlier statement to this effect at 1006–7), but one which nonetheless allows the note of scepticism to hang in the air, so to speak. One can legitimately doubt whether even Athenians who believed in the city's moral decline would have regarded the virtues of Aeschylus' contemporaries as the direct result of watching his plays.

When Aeschylus does reply, adducing *Seven Against Thebes* as a work 'full of Ares', which would have made anyone who saw it 'desire to be warlike' (1021–2), the audience certainly has the option of hearing the inference from dramatic atmosphere to psychological

⁵³ ἡδὲ γὰρ [πολλῶν ἤκουσα [ὧς] ἔστιν ὠφέλιμ[ον το]ῖς ποιήμασιν [όμιλ]εῖν ἂ οἱ πρότε[ροι κα]τέλιπον: POxy. III 414 (col. I.8–13), attributed by some, e.g. Lanata 1963: 214–17, to Antiphon, but this is rebutted by Pendrick 2002: 31. For an alternative attribution to Critias, see Giuliano 1998: 151–62 and, more agnostically, Giuliano 2005: 82–4; cf. Ch. 6, 313–14. On the adj. ὠφέλιμος, cf. n. 50 above.

effect as absurdly simplistic and question-begging. *Seven* is saturated in the language and imagery of war, but can a play in which (quasi-) civil conflict leads to the mutual slaughter of the sons of Oedipus be an unqualified *encouragement* or incitement to warfare?⁵⁴ The point is obliquely reinforced by Dionysus' seemingly buffoonish objection that the play has had a disastrous effect by making *Thebans* braver (and capable, so runs the unstated subtext, of winning victories over Athens). Aeschylus' response to this, blaming the Athenians themselves for failing to maintain their military standards, might strike a passing chord in its own terms, given Athens' desperate military position in 405. But it does nothing to make Aeschylus' model of poetic didacticism any more convincing on this point, especially since it implicitly concedes that a city's military policies depend on something other/more than the works of contemporary tragic playwrights. Nor does Aeschylus' use of *Persians* as a second instance of his contribution to the patriotic valour of his audiences escape from the entanglements of his position: the example is both patently back-to-front (the play is *later* than the military events to which it refers), utterly bland in its formulation ('I taught [them] always to want to defeat their enemies', 1026–7), and vulnerable to some kind of undercutting by Dionysus' response at 1028–9, which, textual problems notwithstanding, seems to transfer emphasis from the militaristic uplift claimed by Aeschylus to his own experience, as spectator, of 'tragic pleasure' in the atmosphere of grief and lamentation enacted in parts of the play.⁵⁵ Finally, the naming of Lamachus (a military figure of, as it happens, the generation of Euripides or later!) as a prime

⁵⁴ The speciousness of invoking *Septem* as a paradigm of heroism-inducing drama is noticed by Zeitlin (1990: 89), but in the same breath she begs the (comic) question by asserting that 'Aristophanes would have us believe' in this view of the play. It seems likely that Aristophanes knowingly borrowed/echoed from Gorgias (B24 DK) the description of *Septem* as 'full of Ares'; cf. e.g. Lanata 1963: 207, Segal 1962: 131–2, 153–4 n. 121 (though 'systematic literary theory' is scarcely what *Frogs* attests). But it hardly follows that the contest as a whole in *Frogs* depends on a Gorgianic prototype, *contra* Pohlenz 1965: ii. 452. On the latter's much discussed but speculatively inflated thesis, cf. Newiger 1957: 131–2 n. 4, Pfeiffer 1968: 47 n. 1, Clayman 1977: 28–9, O'Sullivan 1992: 20–1, with Ch. 6, 266–84, for Gorgias' poetics more generally. Cf. n. 47 above for a different Gorgianic echo/affinity at *Frogs* 973.

⁵⁵ The particle γοῦν (1028) arguably implies (partial) support for Aeschylus' militaristic claim; cf. Denniston 1954: 452. But it could equally mark a strong *modification* of the claim; see now Hunter (2009: 38), and cf. Ch. 5, 224, with n. 36 there. Harrison (2000: 106), misled by the English tr. of 'unmixed delight' for χαίρειν, thinks the latter incompatible with tragic sympathy: this is refuted by Pl. *Resp.*

specimen of the supposed influence of Homer's military 'teaching', might be described as transparently ludicrous, if there were not so many modern scholars who miss the point.⁵⁶

If Aeschylus' case for the impingement of his own plays on the military attitudes of the Athenians comes across as a simultaneously incoherent and wildly inflated form of the (plausible general) conviction that poetic works stand in a significant relationship to the cultural ethos of their times, can the other side of the coin, his critique of Euripides' responsibility for Athens' moral decline, be any more cogent?⁵⁷ On the level of authorial personae, it is worth noticing, Aeschylus makes no impact on Euripides' own stance (as opposed, perhaps, to scoring a salacious hit, with Dionysus' help, against his *private* life at 1046–8). Euripides refuses to yield on any of the specific counts, showing by his defiant questions ('what harm do my Sthenoboiads do . . .?', 1049; 'didn't I compose a plot about Phaedra that was really the case?', 1052; 'did *you* teach the Athenians the best things . . .?', 1056–8; '*what* did I do [wrong]?', 1062; 'what harm did I do by that?', 1064) that despite their seeming agreement on fundamentals of poetic value at 1008–10 he does not go along with Aeschylus' sweeping (and, of course, drastically selective) version of moral cause and effect between the tragic theatre and its audiences. Neither here nor elsewhere can we confidently infer how different spectators of *Frogs* might have reacted to the unstable cut and thrust of the contest. But one can at least say that Aristophanes has made sure the *disputability* of the relationship between critical principles and their specific application is placed in the limelight.

10.605c–606b, where the verb is used three times precisely in connection with tragic pity (cf. Pl. *Phlb.* 48a, χαίροντες κλάωσι, of tragedy's 'mixed pleasure-and-pain', badly mistranslated by Frede 1993: 56); at *Frogs* 921 the verb indicates pleasure in theatrically pregnant Aeschylean silences. Mastromarco and Totaro (2006: 659 n. 166) also miss this point. On the textual problems in *Frogs* 1028, see Dover 1993: 320–1, Sommerstein 1996: 246, Wilson 2007b: 177–8, Garvie 2009: pp. liv–lv.

⁵⁶ See Halliwell 1982: 154 (where 'slightly deflates' understates the point). Sommerstein (1996: 248) is typical of the commentators in taking no account of the contextual signals of absurdity and seeing 'sincere admiration' in the reference; likewise e.g. Austin and Olson 2004: 276, Paduano and Grilli 1996: 154 (also badly misunderstanding the point of ὅθεν in *Frogs* 1040). Goldhill 1991: 212–13 is exceptional in appreciating the irony of *Frogs* 1039.

⁵⁷ One issue here is the 'suppressed' fact that certain Aeschylean characters are themselves notable for immorality: Rosen (2008) has helpful reflections on this point.

Aeschylus' moral-cum-social denunciation of Euripidean drama, like everything else in the kaleidoscope of critical viewpoints in *Frogs*, is a version of a possible (even, probably, an actual) way of looking at things, but a version whose 'fortissimo' delivery of overstatement carries us into the realms of (self-)parody. It is one thing to show a proto-Platonic concern for the disturbing female eroticism of figures such as Phaedra and Stheneboia;⁵⁸ even to describe them as 'whores' (πόρναι, 1043) is an intelligible shorthand, if one equates Aeschylus with the kind of person who reacts to ethically problematic characters by reducing their actions to the lowest common denominator. But not only does Aeschylus treat the *works* in question as unqualifiedly equivalent to the would-be adulteresses who appear in them, thereby ignoring the complexities of the larger narratives to which they belong (and in which, to put the point concisely, they suffer and die). He also suggests that by writing such plays Euripides 'persuaded' (ἀνέπεισας, 1050) respectable Athenian women (to ponder adultery? and then) to commit suicide, whether from shame at their own adulterous desires or simply by association with the tragic figures in question.⁵⁹ Apart from apparently conflating in his tirade at 1049–51 the plots of Euripides' *Stheneboia* (in which the heroine did not commit suicide) and his first *Hippolytus* (in which Phaedra did), Aeschylus here assumes a model of direct causal flow from poetry to life which flouts every criterion of plausibility: Euripides did not *invent* the idea of female adultery (that, one way or another, is the force of the playwright's retort at 1052), and the works singled out could hardly be thought to show such adultery in anything but a disastrous light.

No less flagrantly preposterous is Aeschylus' further claim that the rags worn by some Euripidean heroes (one of the contest's rare hints at the idea of tragic pity⁶⁰) have produced an epidemic of wealthy

⁵⁸ At Pl. *Resp.* 3.395e Socrates includes *erôs*-afflicted females among the kinds of characters whose roles the Guardians of Callipolis should not perform.

⁵⁹ The verb ἀναπειθεῖν (again at 1071) sometimes refers to seduction or corruption; it may here imply the ellipsis indicated in my text. Sommerstein (1996: 250 *ad* 1050–1) is hermeneutically baffling: claiming the passage would be 'pointless' unless it alluded to at least one known suicide (an arbitrary limitation on comic fantasy), he also admits there need have been no event that even remotely fitted Aeschylus' case. Dover (1972: 185) seems to assume there were Athenians who believed such things about Euripides' plays.

⁶⁰ *Frogs* 1063 is the play's only direct reference to pity (cf. the same view of Euripidean rags at Ar. *Ach.* 413, with ἄθλιος, *Ach.* 420–2), apparently treating it as a

Athenians who adopt such clothing in an effort to plead poverty when selected to perform major financial services ('liturgies') for the city (1063–6). It is important to see that if Aeschylus here (partially) evokes social phenomena that may have been familiar to the audience of *Frogs*, that in itself contributes to the absurdity of his case. If the economic pressures and crises of war were affecting the public behaviour of some wealthier Athenians, the non-sequitur involved in deriving such things from the costumes of Euripidean heroes turns the argument into a (self-)parody of attempts to relate behaviour in drama to behavioural trends in contemporary life.⁶¹ The effect of self-parody reaches a climax in the agon's concluding pñigos, where Aeschylus expostulates, 'which evils *can't* he be blamed for!' (1078), and suitably backs up the indiscriminate logic of his condemnation by adducing a mini-catalogue of Euripidean procuresses, women giving birth in temples, sisters who commit incest with their brothers, and characters who state that 'to exist is not to exist'—all this in order to explain why Athens is now full (not, as ought to be the case, of procuresses, etc. but) of bureaucratic officials, 'buffoonish monkey-politicians', and a population too unfit to take part in torch-races!

If we ask where all this leaves Dionysus, the answer is that the gulf between Aeschylus (sweepingly assertive that tragedy shapes and defines its culture) and Euripides (sceptically demanding specific evidence which he is never given) leaves the god/judge drifting

Euripidean speciality, though 1028–9 (n. 55 above) *may* involve tragic sympathy in response to *Persians*. Aeschylus is strongly associated with heroic uplift (esp. 1021–2), while ἐκπλήττειν at 962 may evoke a *frisson* of theatrical fear (though *ekplêxis* is elsewhere compatible with pity as well: cf. Ch. 5 n. 50). *Frogs* seems, then, to *divide* 'pity and fear' (probably established as a tragic combination: Ch. 5 n. 122) between the two playwrights; cf. Halliwell 2005a: 398, and see *Vita Aesch.* 332.3–5 Page (1972), no doubt influenced by *Frogs*, for Aeschylus as a poet of *ekplêxis* rather than pity. Some have taken both *ekplêxis* and 'deception' (see 910) in *Frogs* to reflect Gorgianic influence (cf. n. 54 above): Pohlenz 1965: ii. 452–6, O'Sullivan 1992: 21 (omitting to mention the *contrast* in the Aeschylean *Vita* between *ekplêxis* and 'deception', which cuts across O'Sullivan's own thesis of a complete alignment between Gorgias and Aeschylus); but cf. Pfeiffer 1968: 47, Willi 1993: 92 and his n. 99 for a different view. On Gorgianic 'deception', see Ch. 6, 274–7.

⁶¹ The principle applies to other details of Aeschylus' case: reduced use of gymnasia by the young (1070, cf. 1087–8); changes in the relationship between naval crews and their officers (1071–3); the existence of bureaucratic officials and deceptive politicians (1084–6). In every case, (some) Athenians might be aware of phenomena that (partially) corresponded to the description; but how could anyone have believed that it was all because of Euripidean influence?

unanchored between the rival currents of argument. When elements of irony, obtuseness, and/or facetiousness have been factored in (and the tone of Dionysus' utterances could be played with various nuances by a skilled actor), the result is little better than a chaotic flux.⁶² The main stages, several of them already noted earlier, are easily registered. After the silliness of 1012 (Euripides deserves 'to die' if he corrupted his audience), Dionysus may indicate weary foreboding over Aeschylean militarism (1018, but the attribution is disputed); he certainly deprecates Aeschylus' threatened silence (1020), complains about the supposed effect of *Seven Against Thebes* on the Thebans themselves (1023–4), expresses appreciation (in possibly garbled terms) for the theatrical pleasure he derived from watching *Persians* (1028–9), observes that Homer's military instructiveness was lost on a clumsy Athenian called Pantacles (1036–8: an implicit dig at a poetics of reductive didacticism),⁶³ helps Aeschylus to score a hit against Euripides' (putative) marital problems (1047–8), remains silent during the stretch when the two tragedians are locked most keenly in disagreement (1049–64), before contributing a trio of anecdotal remarks in ostensible support of Aeschylus' view of current Athenian society (1067–8, 1074–6, 1089–98), none of these remarks, significantly, making any mention of Euripides' plays or their alleged influence on the behaviour at issue.

It hardly needs stressing that there is no 'critical' insight to be gained (directly) from Dionysus' interjections during the second half of the agon. They add the reverse of weight to Aeschylus' case; the series of anecdotes towards the end is mostly notable for its 'bomolochically' crude references to bodily matters (warm clothes under rags; farting and defecation in the crowded conditions on a trireme; a fat runner being slapped by spectators and farting in consequence). They also further destabilize Dionysus' credentials as critic and judge:

⁶² I do not recognize the seriousness found by some scholars in the post-parabolic Dionysus: e.g. Sommerstein 1996: 12 ('enough dignity to be a credible arbiter'), Segal 1961: 214 ('a sense of dignity'), Higham 1972: 13 ('gravity befitting a judge'). Try e.g. 1074–7, 1089–98 for dignity or gravity! Contrast Parker 2005: 151 n. 70, Heiden 1991: 99 ('becomes more buffoonish').

⁶³ Even as astute a judge as Dover (1970: 231) is too quick to think that the *only* point of 1036–8 is the bomolochic role of Dionysus. It is possible, though not certain, that the passage presupposes a problem later raised by some critics about the order of arming in certain Homeric passages: cf. Asmis 1990b: 175 with n. 91, Armstrong 1995: 261 n. 26. For the more general conception of Homer as a teacher of military strategy, cf. Ch. 6, 297.

his sensitivity to tragic theatre (visible, just briefly, in the emotional recollection at 1028–9) is swamped by his inability to keep the fundamental issues of the debate in any kind of steady focus. At best, Dionysus underlines, in his peculiarly buffoonish, bewildered way, the impression of undecidability which the polarized dialectic of the agon has generated and which is summed up, as I mentioned earlier, in the chorus's following song ('it's a tall order to decide between them', 1100). Over the agon as a whole, Dionysus makes marginally more comments on Euripides' than Aeschylus' side, and when he does lean towards the latter it is either to make *ad hominem*, 'biographical' gibes at Euripides or to concur with Aeschylus' verdict on contemporary Athenian decadence in its own right. The dynamics of the contest have not yet, it seems, undermined his partiality for Euripidean poetry.

As a final consideration on the agon, I want briefly to return to the asymmetrical position in which the (hypothetical, even fictionalized) audience of *Frogs* itself stands to the two tragedians. If Aeschylus and Euripides appear to agree on general principles of poetic value while totally diverging on their application, part of this paradox consists in the fact that each of them asserts a negative correlation between plays and audiences in the case of the other's work but claims a positive correlation where his own work is concerned. Euripides links the portentous, overblown shams of Aeschylean dramaturgy with the gullibility of earlier audiences, while claiming that the 'democratic' articulateness of his own characters produced a breed of alert, (self-) critical spectators. Aeschylus claims credit for the patriotic, martial heroism of the era of the Persian Wars, but ascribes to Euripidean drama responsibility for all the immorality, effeteness, and rhetorical vacuity of an Athens in military and cultural decline. For the first audience of *Frogs*, however, this is no (comically) balanced equation of opposites. Even if we make allowance for occasional restagings of Aeschylus' plays in the late fifth century, Aristophanes' spectators are by definition much closer to Euripides than to Aeschylus: in the polarized stereotypes of the debate, Euripidean Athens amounts to *their* Athens.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ To feel part of the era of Aeschylus, spectators in 405 would have had to be born earlier than Euripides—so no later than, say, 490: there can have been very few of them indeed. It is impossible now to estimate with precision what the 'average' spectator's familiarity with Aeschylus' tragedies may have been in 405. Dover 1993:

The point is foregrounded in both halves of the agon. Euripides gestures at the audience at 954 ('I taught these people to use their tongues'), at 960 ('since these people have intimate knowledge of my work'), and again at 972 ('I introduced such ways of thinking to these people'). Aeschylus matches him by twice using the temporal adverb *νῦν*, 'nowadays', in condemning contemporary Athenians, first as 'vulgar idiots', 1015, then as being so physically unfit as to be incapable of participating in traditional torch-races, 1088 (cf. the same adverb in Dionysus' mouth at 917, 980, 1076). The audience's asymmetrical relationship to the poets is a necessary concomitant of Aristophanes' decision to stage a grand antinomy between the past and present of tragic theatre. Nothing follows automatically from this asymmetry about how different spectators in 405 would actually respond to the contrasting styles of the playwrights or the cultural values they proclaim. But on the level of poetico-cultural schematization, the hypothetical audience of *Frogs* (i.e. 'these people' at whom Euripides gestures, thereby drawing them metatheatrically into the semi-fictionalized Athens of the comedy) is given an unavoidably divided perspective on the contest. In so far as they feel any degree of identification or agreement with either side, they will, one way or another, be partially condemning 'themselves': sympathize with the Aeschylean case, and they will implicitly accept the degeneracy of the present; preen themselves, *à la* Euripides, on their acute modern intelligence, and they will fall short of the ethos of heroized valour associated with their ancestors.

At the same time, though, Aristophanes does offer them a possible alternative: to appreciate knowingly and comically their implication in the teasing conundrum of the past-present dichotomy of values, and to pride themselves on the theatrical subtlety needed to follow its twists and turns in the polarized rhetoric of the debate. Such subtlety—the 'cleverness' of this same Euripidean audience, but in its specifically *Aristophanic* guise⁶⁵—involves a capacity to recognize

23 ('This fact . . .') exaggerates the implications of putative restagings of Aeschylus; for the evidence see *TrGF* iii. 57–8 (T72–7), but the list *ibid.* 56–7 is a tissue of uncontrolled conjecture. Hutchinson 1985: pp. xlii–xliii expresses heterodox scepticism about restagings, though he is over-optimistic (pp. xl–xlii) about the circulation of *texts* of Aeschylus. Lech (2008) uses *Frogs* 1021 (cf. 124 above) to argue that *Seven Against Thebes* had been restaged between 411 and 405.

⁶⁵ For the *sophos* and *dexios* terms used to mark the audience's own 'cleverness', see 676, 700, 1118, with nn. 29, 38, 50 above.

Frogs' parodic version of the extreme stances (*pro* and *contra*, 'progressive' and 'reactionary') to which a culture's attempts to evaluate its own historical shifts can give rise. And it also involves a keen alertness to the dilemmas of poetic value which the comedy highlights in the very act of converting them into distorted caricatures.

DIONYSUS AS LOVER-CUM-CRITIC: EMBODYING THE PROBLEM OF POETICS

In the strophic song at *Frogs* 1099–1118 which confirms the inconclusiveness of the agon and the need for the debate to continue, the chorus (resorting in part to the imagery of warfare) pit Aeschylus' forceful, head-on strategy against Euripides' deft ability to manoeuvre himself for a counter-offensive. They give a kind of implicitly Euripidean slant to the whole contest, however, by encouraging both poets to say something 'subtle' or 'delicate' (λεπτόν, 1108, cf. 1111) as well as 'skilful' or 'clever' (σοφόν). They had done something similar at 876, singing there of the poets' 'subtle-reasoning minds' (λεπτολόγους...φρένας). Elsewhere in the play λεπτός terms are applied only to Euripides and his influence (828, 956) and never to Aeschylus on his own. Clearly the lexicon of subtlety, finesse, or delicacy suits the overall Euripidean persona much better than that of Aeschylus.⁶⁶ By allowing themselves to describe their expectations of *both* sides in such language at 1108, 1111, the chorus are as it were betraying hints of a Euripidean sensibility, just as they did with the term ἀστεῖος (urbane, stylish, sophisticated) at 906, immediately after applying it to Euripides at 901a.

It is important to notice, for future reference, that up to and including the song at 1099–1118 the chorus have not indicated any marked penchant for Aeschylus or any overt reservations about Euripides; they have relished the exciting contrast of styles and

⁶⁶ On λεπτός (a word found in Euripides' plays but not those of Aeschylus or Sophocles), and its place in the critical scheme of contrasts between grandeur and delicacy, see O'Sullivan (1992: esp. 137–8, 142). Other Aristophanic passages which link *leptos* terms with Euripides and/or intellectualism include *Ach.* 445, *Clouds* 153, 359, 1404, *Birds* 318; cf. Beta 2004: 135–40, Taillardat 1965: 294–5, Denniston 1927: 119. The compound ὑπολεπτολόγος is aimed against Aristophanes himself by application to the 'Euripid-Aristophanizer' in Cratinus fr. 342 (95–6 with n. 6 above).

qualities between the two figures. What's more, when they reassure the playwrights, in the antistrophe at 1109–18, that the audience are all capable of following the subtleties (λεπτά) of the debate (adding, in a much-discussed phrase, that 'each spectator has a book and understands clever things', 1114),⁶⁷ they dismiss any fear of the spectators' ignorance by saying 'things are not like that *any longer*' (οὐκέτι, 1112) and claiming that 'nowadays' (νῦν: cf. above for Aeschylus' disparaging use of the adverb) their natures are razor-sharp. In other words, they elevate the contemporary theatre audience, in terms of sophistication, over theatre audiences of the past, thereby echoing the point of view represented in the agon by Euripides, who accused Aeschylean audiences of being naive and boasted of having taught his own spectators to think and reason for themselves. So in this respect too the chorus, while trying to be even-handed, seem more than a little inclined towards 'Euripidean' priorities.

In the following scene, it is Euripides who proposes the topic of prologues for rigorous scrutiny, that style of scrutiny which suits his quasi-forensic persona in the play.⁶⁸ He starts by picking up Aeschylus for the obscurity of language with which he had charged him in the agon too (1122 harks back to 927, though there the reference was not to prologues), and he extends this line of criticism, with some help from Dionysus, to a diagnosis of superfluous repetition in certain lines of Aeschylus. This sets a pattern of close verbal dissection which Dionysus describes as dependent on 'correctness of language' (ὁρθότης τῶν ἐπῶν, 1181), a phrase which has long been recognized as having some resonance in relation to the linguistic interests, both formal and semantic, of intellectuals like Protagoras

⁶⁷ For various views of the point of 1114 see Sommerstein 1996: 255–6, Harris 1989: 87, Dover 1993: 34–5, Denniston 1927: 117–18, Revermann 2006b: 118–20; the hypothesis of a specific handbook of 'literary criticism', e.g. Radermacher 1954: 303, Webster 1939: 170, now looks particularly naive. Cf. n. 35 above. For an argument against widespread reading of tragedy in the 5th cent., see Mastromarco 2006: esp. 137–70; cf. Revermann 2006a: 14–17.

⁶⁸ Euripides says he will 'scrutinize' or 'test' (βασανίζειν) Aeschylus' prologues (1121, cf. 1123). The word can refer to testing metals, but also to close interrogation (e.g. Ar. *Ach.* 110, 647) and forensic torture of slaves: cf. its repeated occurrence at *Frogs* 616–42, which would resonate at the back of the mind of a receptive audience of *Frogs*. Euripides is associated with such language also at 802 and 826; Aeschylus ends up using it himself at 1367. A related quasi-forensic term is (ἐξ)ελέγχειν, (cross-) examine or interrogate: Euripides uses it at 894, 908, 922, 960–1, cf. 786, 857 with general reference to the contest; Aeschylus uses it only at 1366 (see 139 below). Compare the verb ἐξετάζειν at Phld. *Poem.* 1.194.23–4 Janko.

and Prodicus.⁶⁹ It is reasonable, therefore, to take the scene as moving in a direction which would make many think, at least vaguely, of sophistic methods of categorization and conceptual analysis, especially since comparison with Plato's *Euthydemus* prompts the suspicion that some of the exchanges between the playwrights are intentionally redolent of sophistic styles of logic-chopping repartee. But there is a decisive turning-point in the scene (and, as it turns out, in the entire contest) when Aeschylus, after trying to score a few tit-for-tat points of critical analysis in the semi-sophistic manner initiated by Euripides, announces that he will give up line-by-line and word-by-word scrutiny (1198) and instead destroy his opponent's prologues 'with a single oil-flask' (1200–1). This takes us into the notorious sequence of quips, eight in all, built round the phrase *ληκύθιον ἀπώλεσεν* ('he ruined/lost his oil-flask'), and it does so in a way which is related to Aeschylus' shift of 'critical' method.

It is curious, at first sight, that the oil-flask passage has received quite so much scholarly attention, given that it is the most blatant exploitation of mechanical comic repetition in the surviving plays of Aristophanes. Mechanical repetition, indeed, is Aeschylus' deliberate tactic; it allows him to insinuate that Euripidean prologues are themselves irredeemably formulaic and predictable. Of course there are questions worth asking about the staging of the scene, as well as about the possibility of *doubles entendres* (readily supplemented with phallic byplay) in Aeschylus' choice of the *ληκύθιον* tag, though one should not underestimate the potential of the repeated tag to acquire a nonsensical momentum of its own.⁷⁰ But what significance, if any, does the scene hold for the unfolding thematics of poetic criticism? Is the episode a lightweight diversion ('the humour more of children's pantomime than of sophisticated comedy', as Dover puts it) from the rather relentless immersion in verbal intricacy that has prevailed for the past four hundred lines? Certainly it is more transparently contrived, and less obviously of consequence for the major concerns of tragic theatre, than anything else in the contest up to this point. But there may be something more to be said about its bearing on the problems of criticism.

⁶⁹ See Dover 1993: 29–32 for a survey of the evidence, with Segal (1970) on the possible influence of Protagoras in particular.

⁷⁰ See Borthwick 1993, Dover 1993: 337–9, Sommerstein 1996: 263–5 for various views on the significance of the *lekuthion* tag.

The impetus of the passage stems from Aeschylus' explicit decision to abandon close scrutiny or careful 'reading' of his opponent's poetry. When he states that he will no longer 'scratch' Euripides' plays verse by verse, he uses that same phrase, *κατ' ἔπος* (1198), which I commented on earlier at line 802 (111 above), where Pluto's slave reported Euripides' determination to 'test' (*βασανίζειν*) the plays in precisely this way. And that is what Euripides himself, practitioner of linguistic subtleties, does at the outset of the prologue section, wrangling tenaciously over the interpretation of various elements in the opening lines of *Choephoroi*. Aeschylus' change of tack is designed to be a sort of critical short-cut, arriving at a damning dismissal of Euripidean poetry by overriding, indeed conspicuously *defying*, any consideration of context. With some perverse logic, for certain, but not without regard for context, Euripides had tried to convict Aeschylus of 'saying the same thing twice' (1154–74), in itself a motif which probably reflects combative sophistic debating topoi,⁷¹ in two different lines from the prologue of *Choephoroi*. When Dionysus turns attention to Euripides' own prologues, the latter denies that his opponent will ever find *him* committing this poetic offence (1178).

Aeschylus does not immediately respond to that challenge. Instead he starts by using the 'Euripidean' method of verbal analysis to pounce on other sorts of inconcinnity or inconsistency: we seem here very much in a *Euthydemus*-like world of sophistic eristics. But he rapidly tires of this approach, and switches to the 'little oil-flask' method instead. The resulting impression is that technically refined analysis is being displaced by belittling mockery: it is a demonstration of the end of the 'critical' spectrum at which everything is subordinated to a destructive impulse (Aeschylus' use of *διαφθείρειν*, 'destroy' (1200), is no accident). In dramatic terms, this point translates itself into the fact that Euripides appears more helpless here in the face of Aeschylus' attack than he has so far been. The harder he tries to

⁷¹ Unnecessary repetition is hardly a concern rooted in the traditions of song/poetry, where repetitions are actively cultivated for formal, stylistic, and expressive effect. But at Pl. *Euthd.* 279d Socrates purports to be afraid that one would make a laughing-stock of oneself by 'saying the same thing twice' in front of sophists: beyond Socrates' irony (cf. Pl. *Grg.* 490e, with Dodds 1959: 290), and given the tone of the exchanges elsewhere in the dialogue, this makes sense for the ethos of eristic debating. Stanford 1958: 171, Del Corno 1994: 226 point out the relevance of Prodicus' concern with synonyms (and therefore, presumably, with the avoidance of their duplication), but the *Euthydemus* passage alerts us to a larger sophistic resonance at *Frogs* 1154 ff.

thwart his opponent, the worse it gets and the more inevitable the outcome starts to seem, as Dionysus, who shows a more direct identification with Euripides at this juncture than anywhere since his original expression of nostalgia for him, tries to get him to realize.⁷² After the virtual stalemate of the agon, the prologues episode turns into a rout of Euripides. But it does so only because criticism falls back into nonsensical mockery, divorced from any meaningfully contextualized perception of Euripidean poetry—and also, perhaps, because tragic poetry is intrinsically helpless in the face of a quintessentially *comic* technique of mechanical iteration.

It is striking that in the following phase of the competition Euripides embarks on his exposé of Aeschylean lyrics by seeming to learn something from the 'decontextualized' treatment he has just received from his adversary. His decision to synthesize 'all' Aeschylean lyrics 'into one' (1262), and his heavy emphasis on the recurrence of a refrain (sounded five times in only a dozen lines), both have an affinity with Aeschylus' oil-flask tag. Like that trick, Euripides' techniques of compression and exaggeration exploit the power of repetition as a vehicle of derision. The refrain in particular (ὦ κόπον οὐ πελάθεις ἐπ' ἀρωγάν; 'their woe, alas! comest thou not to avail them?') rapidly degenerates, just like the oil-flask quip, into a barely meaningful iteration that becomes increasingly detached, thematically as well as syntactically, from its original context (1265–77). That effect carries over to the second cluster at 1285–95, where nonsense is redoubled by the interjection of meaningless (yet suggestively strident) lyre-strummings among a sequence of disjointed extracts from different passages.⁷³ Euripides has learnt from Aeschylus, it seems, how easy (and damning) it can be to devalue a poet's work by dismemberment, removing words from their fabric of connected

⁷² Dionysus stresses the need to pull back from discussion of Euripides' prologues at 1220–1, 1227–8, 1234–6. The god's identification with Euripides is closest at 1228, 'our prologues'.

⁷³ In addition to evoking clangs of loud strumming, the syllables of *φλαττοθραττοφλαττοθρατ* (1286 etc.) might resonate subconsciously with *παφλάζω* (denoting bursting, spluttering noises: cf. the splashing frogs at 249), *φλάω* and *θλάω* (crush, crunch, bruise, etc.), *θράττω* (disturb), and even *Θράττα* (Thracian female), conveying a compound sense of an ugly, disjointed, 'barbarian' racket. Scharffenberger (2007: 243) notes that reading *φλαττοθραττο κτλ.* (with e.g. Dover 1993, Wilson 2007a), as opposed to *τοφλαττοθραττο κτλ.*, gives the strummings the same rhythm (lecythion!) as the *lêkuthion* tag itself.

sense and turning them into a kind of pretentious *noise*, rather than at least paying them the respect of contextualized analysis.

But when Aeschylus' turn comes to respond on the lyric side, he too is of course able to sustain the destructive procedure of (anti-) critical disfigurement which he had been the first to introduce. There is no need here to undertake a fine-grained examination of either party's distortion of the other's lyrics, even though, paradoxically enough, Aristophanes' own text rewards the attentive 'reading' which it makes the tragedians deny to one another. Specialist analysis of the details of language and metre leaves no doubt that while each poet uses a modicum of recognizable quotation and adaptation from the other's plays, the global effect in both cases is a kind of 'de-composition' or dismantling of the originals, driven by the aim of collapsing sense, structure, and ethos into jumble and confusion.⁷⁴ If the oil-flask tag in the previous scene maintained superficial coherence on a grammatical and metrical level, it nonetheless deflated the register of tragic narrative with wilful arbitrariness and scoffing repetition. The dramatists' travesties of each other's lyrics in the present scene carry the process further by purporting to condense poetic essentials into a single entity while actually dislocating authentic contexts and converting lyric intricacy into a set of musico-poetically absurd sound effects. This is just as true of Euripides' treatment of Aeschylus as vice versa, even though some modern critics are prepared to privilege the older poet's assault on the supposedly *avant-garde* elements in his opponent's songs.⁷⁵

It is crucial to see that from the point of view of Aristophanes' audience, most of whom could hardly have been expected to grasp more than a few of the precise details (partial borrowings, metrical

⁷⁴ In addition to the commentaries of Dover (1993) and Sommerstein (1996), see Zimmermann 1984–7: ii. 13–21, 29–35, Parker 1997: 498–519 for metrical and formal analysis: note esp. Parker's observations (506–7) on the lack of authentic structural resemblances to the work of the poets, and the jumbling of disparate types of material in Aeschylus' treatment of Euripidean monody (515).

⁷⁵ In addition to the general 'noise' produced by disjointed juxtaposition of lyric phrases, both poets stress disagreeable 'sonic' effects: see esp. the repeated 'blow' or 'beat' (*kopos*) of the refrain at 1265 ff.; the plonking lyre-strummings of the second 'refrain' (1286 ff., n. 73 above); and the crude castanet-playing (enacted in some form on stage) of Euripides' whore-like Muse, 1305 ff. (cf. De Simone 2008). Montana (2009) thinks it possible, on the basis of traditional lyrics in other comedies, to infer that Aristophanes must have been lyrically on Aeschylus' side: his argument rests on naive premises and fails to address the larger comic dynamics of *Frogs* 1261–1363.

tricks, thematic echoes, etc.) that go into the making of each pastiche, the impression of disintegration is central. There are two different formulations one might offer here; but they are two sides of the same coin. The first is that without the *comic* success of this mode of de- and recomposition, the scene has no hope of theatrical effectiveness: unless it works in Aristophanic terms, it could only be perplexing and stupefying. At the same time, its comic 'sense' somehow depends on conveying at least a subconscious perception of how the logic of agonistic 'criticism' may tend towards the *destruction* of the object of its judgement. There is a sense in which these two perspectives converge on a single outcome, the exploitation of tragedy (and tragic poetics) by comedy. One is free to feel that the real victory in the contest can only really be won by Aristophanes himself, as he makes his own play out of a cannibalization of tragic poetry.

The competing parodies of the playwrights' lyrics are brought abruptly to an end by Dionysus, who expresses no hint of a verdict on the outcome. The chorus too are silent in this respect, and in the short song (1370–7) which prefaces the 'weighing' contest requested by Aeschylus they betray no partiality to either side, though they do voice a sense of absurdity about the whole scenario ('if someone else had told me this, I would have... thought he was talking drivel!'). One thing theatrically palpable by this stage, however, is an increasing edge for Aeschylus in the poetics of sheer negativity. Not only did he introduce this 'method', in preference to Euripides' inclination for close, *κατ' ἔπος* analysis, but he has been more expansive than Euripides in developing his attacks. Whereas the proportions of the agon were reasonably balanced (with Aeschylus having a slightly longer epirrhematic section), in the prologues scene the disparity of length between the poets' utterances starts to be conspicuous (Aeschylus' side of the argument is almost 30 per cent longer than Euripides'), and in the exchanges of lyrics the gap becomes very substantial (Aeschylus is allowed around three-quarters more space than Euripides). Such counting of lines is obviously a crude measure, but it does point to a kind of domination that would be cumulatively transmitted in performance. This disproportion is not equivalent, however, to qualitative superiority. It is more of a reflex of the playwrights' personae, since Aeschylus is depicted in every way as a figure of greater bulk and vehemence than his lighter, more delicate opponent. (One can easily imagine several ways in which the contrast could have been kept perpetually before the audience's eyes through

the costuming of the characters.) Certainly that contrast threatens to move centre stage with Aeschylus' request for the weighing competition and his reference to the 'weight', 'mass', or 'gravity' (βάρος, 1367) of tragedy, the very feature which Euripides had earlier boasted of removing from the genre (941).⁷⁶ But any spectator who expected poor prospects for Euripides in this regard would, as it happens, be anticipating the right result for the wrong reasons.

Before we observe why that is the case, we should notice a twist of irony in Aeschylus' request. I mentioned earlier that the need for weighing and measuring equipment, as described in the pre-contest reported by Pluto's slave, seemed to be associated with the technical-cum-forensic insistence of Euripides on scrupulously 'testing' (βασανίζειν) the qualities of tragedy, as opposed to the more 'intuitive', rawly natural attitude of Aeschylus to the genre. It now emerges that the older poet has after all seen a possible advantage for himself in 'weighing' their respective work, an irony underlined by the fact that he also now appropriates two items (βασανίζειν and (ἐξ)ελέγχειν) of the quasi-forensic vocabulary which has previously been a hallmark of the mentality displayed by Euripides during the debate.⁷⁷ The omens are starting to look bleaker for Euripides. Yet, as we know (again from the pre-contest), no amount of quasi-objective 'measuring' can dispense with the need for an act of critical evaluation and adjudication. And Dionysus the judge has said nothing at all so far to suggest abandoning his favourite poet.

The weighing competition turns out to be the penultimate stage of the whole contest. But it also proves, despite its one-sidedness, to be no help in reaching a verdict. In the first place, the superior 'gravity' of Aeschylean language has no connection after all with the stylistic traits characterized by the same term earlier in the play: Aeschylus outweighs Euripides here on the basis of three individual lines which happen to include references to a river, death, chariots, and corpses—things, needless to say, no more essential to the one playwright's poetry than to the other's, but which allow a series of puns on the notion of 'heavy' or 'ponderous' words. Rather than reviving the

⁷⁶ We do not know whether such terminology already had critical currency, but for subsequent uses of *baros* as a stylistic category cf. van Hook 1905: 16, Pritchett 1975: 81; Dover 1993: 33 n. 65 is sceptical on this point. On the larger issue of critical terminology in *Frogs*, cf. Willi 1993: 87–94, challenging earlier views.

⁷⁷ See n. 68 above.

previous stylistic antithesis between bulky and slender, the weighing scene is more like a *reductio ad absurdum* of the whole notion of making an objective assessment of poetic value. But where exactly does the absurdity lie? Xanthias the slave had originally found the idea of 'weighing' tragedy preposterous: he saw it as a sort of category-mistake, treating plays as though they were sheep. Dionysus himself significantly makes a similar point, reluctantly and wearily agreeing to go along with the exercise ('if I really *must*', εἴπερ γε δεῖ καὶ τοῦτό με, 1368) while comparing it to selling cheese. And the chorus follow this up, as we have seen, with a comment on the absurdity and incredibility of what Aeschylus has just proposed (1372–7). What they all find ridiculous is a plan which has already been subjected to comic transmutation: a classic example, in fact, of how Aristophanes likes to transfer ideas from the realm of the conceptual and metaphorical into that of concrete enactment.⁷⁸

But where does that leave the idea of poetic value as such, an idea, surely, which neither Aristophanes nor Athenian theatre audiences in general could have been happy to jettison? If Greek culture possessed (and could possess) no art for objectively measuring the excellence of poetry, it was nonetheless traditionally and vigorously committed, not least in the festival theatre of Athens itself, to the principle of evaluating poetry. There was no escaping the culturally embedded conviction that poetic value mattered and precisely for that reason was worth exposing to competition and judgement; and if that was so, the *need* for criteria, standards, and conditions of poetic evaluation could not be intrinsically absurd. The piquancy of the weighing scene of *Frogs*—a scene which can be appreciated on one level as a piece of visibly absurd stage business, but on another as a comic enactment of a conceptual puzzle—is that it does not simply push to the limits the notion of 'weighing' poetic value, it also thereby heightens Dionysus' fundamental problem as critic. If Aeschylus ostensibly wins the weighing contest (though the theatricality of the moment would be more aptly described as a contest that dissolves into total confusion between the verbal and the physical, 1407–10), Dionysus is evidently no nearer to finding grounds on which to decide who is the better playwright. He throws up his hands in despair and expresses his undivided attachment to the two poets:

⁷⁸ Newiger (1957) remains the standard account of this aspect of the plays; cf. his remarks (53–4) on the weighing motif.

ἄνδρες φίλοι, καὶ γὰρ μὲν αὐτοὺς οὐ κρινῶ.

οὐ γὰρ δι' ἔχθρας οὐδετέρῳ γενήσομαι. (1411–12)

I love both these men and *I'm* not going to judge them.

I refuse to be on bad terms with either.

This is a brief but telling hint, if anyone needed it, of a love of tragedy which would not want to *lose* either Aeschylus or Euripides.⁷⁹ Which-ever way round we choose to take the remark which follows, 'I think one of them masterly, and/but I take delight in the other' (τὸν μὲν γὰρ ἡγοῦμαι σοφόν, τῷ δ' ἡδομαι, 1413), makes little difference, though the order Aeschylus–Euripides is surely preferable. The appreciation of poetic expertise or mastery and the experience of poetic pleasure, however each of these might be defined, are both recognizable categories of poetic quality, though *neither* has been 'tested' by the weighing scene itself. In any case, we need not understand Dionysus as drawing a complete disjunction between them: his remark does not imply that he gets no pleasure from the first or sees no poetic mastery in the second.⁸⁰ The one certainty at this stage is that Dionysus the (would-be) connoisseur of tragedy has been reduced—by a combination, we might feel, of bewilderment at the multiplicity of 'evidence' put before him and an underlying appreciation of the merits of different styles of tragic poetry—to an instinctive resistance to making a final choice between the playwrights.

What happens next is the hinge round which most interpretations of *Frogs* ultimately revolve. But it is a hinge which allows movement in opposite directions. Told by Pluto that only if he can reach a decision will he be allowed to take the victorious poet back to earth with him, Dionysus explains to the tragedians that he came down to Hades in search of a poet who can help 'save' the city (1419) and allow its dramatic festivals to continue. Here, for sure, the god compresses into a single proposition a pair of resonant motifs: the city's political survival/prosperity (not a new idea in 405, but certainly one pregnant

⁷⁹ The unsupported claim of Hunter 2009: 14, '*Frogs* will show [*sic*] Euripides' art... to be hollow at its core', ignores the contest's multiple uncertainties and ambivalence, on which Lossau (1987) offers some fine observations. Contrast Silk (2000a: 52), 'Aristophanes is never hostile to Euripides *tout court*'; cf. Avery 1968: 20–1.

⁸⁰ Sommerstein (1996: 147) over-translates (and thereby skews) the contrast at 1413 by rendering σοφός as 'a really great poet'. On this adj., cf. nn. 29, 50, 87. The statement of Walsh (1984: 86) that Aeschylus but not Euripides regards pleasure 'as poetry's proper effect' lacks foundation in the text.

with significance in Athens' perilous circumstances at that date⁸¹) and the flourishing of its great festival theatre. But we also know, though some scholars are readier to admit this than others, that Dionysus said *nothing* about politics or the city's survival, only about his own intense addiction to Euripidean poetry, when he originally explained his underworld quest to Heracles. In that earlier context (71–103), he indicated that the death of Euripides had impoverished the genre of tragedy and left only minor poets on the scene, but he made no connection with the larger 'safety' or prosperity of the city. Any unforced interpretation of *Frogs* needs, therefore, to coordinate (or juggle) those two different factors: Dionysus' original motivation and his new turn towards a more politically inflected paradigm of tragedy's importance. At the very least, we should avoid eliding the difference and producing a speciously tidy teleology for the play as a whole by claiming that Dionysus' story has had a unilinear direction all along.⁸²

That point has important ramifications within the contest itself. Dionysus has so far shown no firmness or clarity of vision as judge. He has fluctuated erratically, with *pro* and *contra* responses, between the two sides of the debate, trying with restricted competence to umpire the contest impartially, showing intermittent signs of sympathy or protectiveness for his original poet of choice, and adding frequent elements of irony and/or buffoonery into the mix. In the agon, he seemed to give a limited amount of credit to both sides at various stages, but he pronounced no overt judgement at its conclusion. In the prologues scene he became alarmed for Euripides' fortunes and recommended an abrupt change of subject at the end (1248). After the poets' pastiches of each other's lyrics, during which his own contributions were anything but critically illuminating, Dionysus declared the subject closed but, again, without any assessment of the outcome

⁸¹ The idea of 'saving' or being a 'saviour' of the city occurs in Aristophanes as early as *Kn.* 149, 458; equally, it is still doing service in the late 390s at *Eccl.* 202, 209, 396–414. Clearly the motif could be adapted to different political conditions.

⁸² Lowe 2007: 47, 'Dionysus ... descends ... to bring back ... Euripides and save tragedy', is an example of the elision in question; so is Worman 2008: 105, 'the contest to determine who might best save the city'. Golden 2005: 210, Dionysus 'travels to Hades to accord to the two dead tragedians the privilege of competing for the right to return', is a more egregious distortion. Konstan 1995: 74, 'political discourse ... is the goal of Dionysus' journey', seems to me false of *both* the end and the beginning.

(1364). And the weighing competition, which he supervised only with reluctance, left him utterly torn in his allegiances, as we saw, and reluctant to make an either-or judgement. After everything that has gone before, then, does Aristophanes give his audience sufficient reason to treat Dionysus as a consistently civic-minded judge? Or can the god's latest move be seen as both an impulsively sentimental gesture and a rather fanciful attempt to identify a means of fulfilling his task as critic of tragedy?

While there is an intelligible sense in which a conception of political wisdom and insight, a poetic capacity to 'advise' (*παραινέιν*, 1420) the community, might be made an ultimate criterion of tragedy's value, Dionysus' interpretation of such a principle is nonetheless a comic travesty—an illustration of how *not* to seek the 'truth' in poetry. It may not be as extreme a travesty as converting evaluation into the weighing of words like physical commodities in the previous scene, but in its own way it blatantly collapses one category of idea into another. By asking the playwrights what they think of a specific, living individual (Alcibiades), and then what views they have on how Athens can escape from its perilous situation in the war, Dionysus is naively confounding the political aspect of Athenian tragedy, which has no place for that kind of direct authorial comment on the contemporary. Ironically, of course, by doing so he is also bringing tragedy into the realms of comedy itself: it is no accident that Dionysus' language of giving 'good advice' at 1420–1 is very close to that used by the chorus in the parabasis of *Frogs* itself (686–7).⁸³ But what does this assimilation mean: that Aristophanes is making fun of Dionysus' naivety? that he is encouraging (or claiming) a convergence (or equality) of tragedy and comedy within a framework of politicized poetics? or that he is trumping tragedy with comedy by dismantling yet another way of judging the former—yet another version of tragic poetics—for his own theatrical purposes?⁸⁴ It seems to me that it is in the very nature of the multi-layered composition of this kind of comic situation that its workings elude any simple inference. More than

⁸³ Cf. also the chorus at *Ar. Lys.* 648. Heiden (1991: 105) rightly stresses that the Alcibiades question is strictly outside tragedy's domain; but his inference that Aristophanes is ironically promoting his own role as poetic 'saviour' of Athens is strained.

⁸⁴ Judet de La Combe (2006) stresses various ways in which comedy itself controls the (conflicting) self-representations of tragedy in *Frogs*.

that, to try to 'mind read' Aristophanes by extracting a single message from his work (as though we could hear his own voice telling us what *he* thought of Alcibiades) is surely to fall into a critical trap as deep as that into which Dionysus stumbles.⁸⁵

One thing, however, emerges unambiguously. Even more tellingly than in the previous stages of the contest, Dionysus' attempt to employ a decisively 'civic' criterion of tragedy's excellence actually fails to yield a result. It would be easy to devote a great deal of analysis to this passage (1422–66, leading up to Pluto's insistence on a decision at 1467), in part because there are acute textual problems which several scholars have explained (with various proposals for reordering the sequence of lines) in terms of a conflation of different versions of the scene.⁸⁶ But for my purposes only two interlocking features of the passage call for emphasis. One is that, whatever order of lines we adopt, Dionysus shows absolutely no sign of being able to choose between the poets on the grounds of their political advice. The other, which is not independent of the textual issue, is that in the end it is difficult for the audience to work out what, if anything, *does* distinguish the poets politically. It is true that the Alcibiades question produces an initially sharp divergence between Euripides' pure hatred (1427–9) and the compromise implicit in Aeschylus' lion cub riddle (1431–2), though we should additionally notice the paradoxical reversal of the poets' earlier political stances: Euripides is here the unequivocal patriot and moralist, Aeschylus the subtle temporizer.

⁸⁵ I therefore cannot accept readings such as those of Heiden 1991: esp. 105–7 (with some very fuzzy political logic, aligning Aeschylus with Cleophon; cf. 96–7, 104), or Möllendorff 2002: 164, which take *Frogs* to claim for comedy itself the civic function Dionysus (unsuccessfully) tries to find in tragedy. The dominant paradigm of Aristophanes' own 'poetics'—see Zimmermann (2004, 2005, 2006a) for accounts by a leading advocate; cf. Bremer (1993: 127–34)—rests on taking more or less at face value passages (esp. from the parabases) in which the poet constructs, as I see it, a heavily fictionalized persona for his relation to the city; see Halliwell 2008: 254–8 with n. 92 there, Bakola 2008: 1–10, and cf. n. 24 above. An example of what I mean by 'mind reading' Aristophanes is the overconfident inference of Hubbard 1991: 214–15: 'one can hardly doubt Aristophanes' cautious approval of Alcibiades' recall... Dionysus ultimately expresses the poet's view'; not dissimilar is MacDowell 1995: 297 (supplemented by the bizarre view that while Aristophanes gives Aeschylus his own views, it would have been 'silly' to let the contest be decided by this factor).

⁸⁶ See Dover 1993: 373–9, Sommerstein 1996: 286–92, 2001: 317–18, 2009: 270–1, Mastromarco and Totaro 2006: 96–8, for discussion of the textual problems and references to further treatments; cf. Radermacher 1954: 344–7, Stanford 1958: 194–6. Möllendorff 1996–7: 142–9 is in a small minority in arguing for retention of the transmitted line-order and speaker attributions.

It is also true that Dionysus appraises the difference between the responses in terms of clarity (surely Euripides') versus adroitness or sagacity (another case of σοφός terminology, 1434). But that contrast is itself the very reason for further indecision on the god's part ('I'm incapable of deciding', δυσκρίτως γ' ἔχω, 1433). And what follows only confirms that if he cannot make up his mind when confronted with a visible split between the two tragedians' 'politics', he is hardly likely to do so when the difference becomes blurred.

And blurred it does appear to become. In the first place, if Euripides is clear (σαφής) rather than adroit (σοφός) at 1434, he acquires a 'supremely adroit nature' (σοφωτάτη φύσις, 1451) in Dionysus' eyes when he proposes a combination of 'aerial' and naval warfare.⁸⁷ In addition, if Aeschylus intimates (not without some obscurity) that the city's salvation or preservation depends on using the 'best' people as its leaders rather than the 'bad' (1454–9), this guidance is hard to distinguish from the advice offered by Euripides at 1446–8 ('if we stopped trusting the citizens we currently trust').⁸⁸ Some scholars, admittedly, wish to attribute these latter lines to Aeschylus himself; but even if we adopt a textual reconstruction which gives both these passages to Aeschylus it makes no difference to the conspicuous failure of the political discussion to settle Dionysus' choice. The contest has to be brought to a concluding adjudication, but no decisive criterion has been found to make this possible. *Frogs* has exposed Dionysus (and its own audience) to a constantly shifting awareness of stylistic, psychological, emotional, dramaturgical, moral, and political components of poetic accomplishment, but it has left him unable to harmonize them into a unified critical viewpoint.

The way in which Dionysus announces his verdict is, accordingly, very peculiar. He declares, in a line which has the hallmark of tragic quotation or adaptation, 'I shall choose the one my soul wishes [to

⁸⁷ 1451 links *sophia* to the antithetical formulation of 1446–50, reinforcing the case for tying σοφῶς at 1434 to the contrastive paradox of 1431b–1432. Cf. Ar. *Ach.* 401, where σοφῶς picks up Euripides' slave's paradox; but see Olson 2002: 178–9 for the alternative reading σαφῶς! Note also the connection between *sophia* and 'modern' poets at *Clouds* 1370.

⁸⁸ I agree with e.g. Sommerstein (1996), Wilson (2007a) against e.g. Dover (1993), Del Corno (1994), in attributing 1442–8 (minus Dionysus' interjections) to Euripides rather than Aeschylus; see the discussions cited in n. 86 above. A crucial consideration is the linguistic and dramatic difficulty of making Aeschylus respond to 1462 with 1442; cf. Paduano and Grilli 1996: 193.

choose]' (αἰρήσομαι γὰρ ὄνπερ ἢ ψυχὴ θέλει, 1468), and caps this by modifying a line from a passage of Euripides' own *Hippolytus* for which he had expressed *admiration* to Heracles at 101–2: 'my tongue swore an oath but I shall choose—Aeschylus!' (1471).⁸⁹ Despite this quasi- or pseudo-tragic flourish of ironic *mystification* (1468 is, in this context, uninformatively tautologous), many interpreters of *Frogs* succumb to the illusion that Dionysus chooses on the grounds of the political advice earlier offered by the poets.⁹⁰ Even some who accept that the verdict has all the appearances of arbitrariness are nevertheless keen to make psychological sense of it—by supposing, for instance, that Dionysus has *tacitly* been more impressed by Aeschylus' than Euripides' political advice, or that he has reached the point of transferring to Aeschylus the kind of intuitive attraction which he originally felt for Euripides.⁹¹ But Dionysus has protested

⁸⁹ 1471 adapts Eur. *Hipp.* 612; *Frogs* 1468 *may* be Euripidean: hence the putative Eur. fr. 888a. The combination of ψυχὴ and (ἐ)θέλειν (cf. Antiph. *Or.* 5.93) conveys an act of volition but not its motivation; cf. n. 91 below.

⁹⁰ See Henderson 2002: 5 (Dionysus chooses on the basis of Athens' salvation), Hubbard 1991: 214 ('Dionysus' final decision must [*sic*] be made on political grounds'), Griffith 1990: 189 (Aeschylus wins by moral/educational *sophia*), Lada-Richards 1999: 219–20 (strangely turning an overtly individual impulse, *Frogs* 1468, into 'the furthest possible extreme from individualistic vision'), Sifakis 1992: 142 ('on the strength of his moral advice'), Paduano and Grilli 1996: 36 (Aeschylus wins because of ll. 1463–5), Higham 1972: 11 ('makes up his mind only after putting ... two questions'), Habash 2000: 13–15, 17 (decision based on 'the social role of drama' and 'the best advice on Athens' salvation'), Cameron 1995: 330 n. 130 ('on moral and political. . . grounds'), Brancacci 2008: 36–7 (Aeschylus wins 'evidently' [!] by criteria at *Frogs* 1009–10), Bakola 2010: 68 ('civic significance'). Even Rosen 2004: 307 ('an aggressive buildup of the navy . . . seems to be the reason why Dionysus finally chooses him') treats such considerations as at least an ostensible explanation for Dionysus' choice, though cf. the next note for the scepticism of his larger reading.

⁹¹ Dover 1993: 20, with n. 29, sees the verdict as 'arbitrary' but not 'capricious', taking it to be a transference of Dionysus' intuitive poetic preferences; *ibid.* 373 ('a contest of σοφία, in which Aeschylus emerges supreme') might be thought to imply a stronger reading of the verdict. Cf. Holzhausen (2000: 44–5), supposing (without good reason) that Aeschylus has made a more emotional impact on the god. Ford (2002: 282) reluctantly and oddly calls the decision 'almost [*sic*] arbitrary'. Walsh (1984: 93–4) gestures towards a political explanation before admitting that 'the criterion of choice remains far from clear'; at 96–7 he recognizes 'confusion' and 'disarray' yet still looks for an implied coherence. Hunter (2009: 36–8) struggles to make sense of 1468: he infers that everything Dionysus 'has heard does carry weight of some kind', but also that 'the god falls back upon the promptings of his ψυχὴ'. For firmer recognition of the problematic nature of Dionysus' decision, see Goldhill 1995: 88 ('Dionysus' confusion and muddled judgment'), Bowie 1993: 250–1 (including the 'slippage' of criteria in the contest), Möllendorff 1996–7: 135–6, 2002: 162–3, Riu 1999: 126–9, Silk 2000a: 366–7 (cf. 264), Schwinge 2002: 41–2, Rosen 2004:

that he does not *want* to judge one of the two poets superior, since he admires them both (1411–13), and that he does not *know* how to make such a judgement (1433–4). Add to those cardinal points the fact that he does not give any *reason* for the decision which Pluto requires him to make, and it is hard to see how Aristophanes could have gone much further in stripping the god's eventual choice of any comprehensible basis. The momentum of the scene carries it towards a sense that the verdict is a comic enactment, but also a comic overcoming, of the god's failure to find a coherent tragic poetics: not just his failure to identify his own reasons for a decision, but the failure of the contest to clinch a compelling way of judging between such different playwrights as Aeschylus and Euripides. The choice of Aeschylus is presented as the very reverse of an act of intelligible or rationalizable 'criticism'.⁹² Although the verb κρίνειν is used, as all along, for the formal adjudication, Dionysus cannot explain his own decision. When Euripides, feeling betrayed, asks him indignantly what he has done, Dionysus replies, with supreme insouciance (or desperation), 'I've decided that Aeschylus is the winner. Well why not?' (ἔκρινα νικᾶν Αἰσχύλον. τίη γὰρ οὐ; 1473). And in the following lines, the last he delivers in the play (see below), Dionysus uses a pastiche of Euripidean 'relativism' to sidestep any further demands for explanation, refusing in any way to clarify a verdict he was required (against all his divided instincts) to declare. The god's decision is suspended in a comic space which places it beyond perspicuous interpretation either from outside or from within.

Throughout *Frogs*, Dionysus is a multiple personality, a prime specimen of the type of improvisatory plasticity and fluid inconsistency which is often salient in major Aristophanic characters. One way of regarding his multiplicity (not, of course, the only way) is as that of a lover of tragedy who cannot work out how to justify his individual responses to tragic drama or how to make sense of them in terms of some larger scheme of poetic values. At best he grasps fitfully

esp. 309–20 (arguing for the influence of an early version of the *Certamen Homeri et Hesiodi*—and NB his brief but general scepticism in 314 n. 44), Scharffenberger 2007: 248–9.

⁹² Konstan (1995: 72) speaks of 'the victory of Aeschylean poetics', linking this, following Walsh (1984: 85–7), with a 'magical' and 'enchanting' (74) conception of language: but the whole contest has underlined Dionysus' inability to find a 'poetics' which can bring him to a decision; and *Frogs* nowhere, in fact, applies a vocabulary of 'magic' or 'enchantment' to Aeschylus.

at various perceptions (of tragic language, character, theme, and emotion) which correspond at least partially to what he has felt in the theatre. But at the same time he is easily undermined in his views by the irreconcilable contentions of the tragedians themselves. The result is a kind of growing bewilderment, frequently expressed as a patently comic obtuseness, confusion, and indecisiveness. Far from becoming clearer or wiser as the play progresses, he becomes increasingly uncertain.⁹³ Yet instead of turning Dionysus into a mere buffoon, such moments might at some level help endear the god of theatre to many spectators of *Frogs*, making him to some degree a comic mirror of themselves. For surely many Athenians might have felt that they too could react intensely to tragic drama without possessing a fully integrated understanding of why they were doing so or what kind of standards they might use to articulate their final judgements on (or preferences between) plays and poets. In the last analysis, Dionysus is a comic success—a character capable of giving Aristophanes' audience a rich array of pleasures, surprises, and even fleeting glimpses of life's enigmas—in large part because he is a lover of tragedy (including, but not only, Euripides) who can cheerfully confess and come to terms with his inability to comprehend the object of his love.

There remains, however, one more element to be considered in the play's finale. It is an element invariably appealed to by those who, unlike myself, believe it feasible to trace a critical, even ideological, coherence and progression in *Frogs*. As Dionysus and the poets go back inside Pluto's palace, the chorus sing a short strophic ode in which they lavish celebratory praise on the victor Aeschylus and cast contemptuous aspersions on the worthlessness of Euripides and his friends (1482–99). One thing that needs saying immediately, because it is exceptional in Aristophanes and has gone largely unnoticed, is that throughout the second half of the play there is a remarkably detached, *non-interactive* relationship between the play's chorus and Dionysus. Apart from the god's initial request for a song at 874, neither party (verbally) acknowledges the other at any stage in the

⁹³ That Dionysus does make progress in his understanding of poetry in *Frogs* is argued by Lada-Richards (1999: 216–33), but her approach almost entirely erases the text's comic properties in favour of a hypothetical religious subtext. The claim of Slater (2002: 206) that Dionysus 'finally master[s] what is required of him to become a successful tragic *spectator*' (his emphasis) is not supported by textual evidence: what exactly do we see that he has 'mastered'?

course of the competition: the chorus repeatedly address or refer to the two tragedians (though there is no dialogue with them) but never do this with the god who is supposed to be judging the contest. One cannot, needless to say, discount the theatrical potential for some sort of visible engagement between Dionysus and the chorus. But the textually significant fact remains that there is a completeness of mutual silence between character and chorus, a state of affairs unparalleled in the other nine surviving plays (i.e. excluding *Plutus*) with which we can make a meaningful comparison.

What matters here, from the perspective of my argument, is that the second half of *Frogs* leaves us with an almost total dissociation between the functions of Dionysus and chorus as critics or judges of tragedy: the only juncture at which they are obviously in tune with one another is when sharing the perception of 'weighing' tragedies as preposterous (1368–77). Even at the climax of the contest, there is no communication at all between them. In their final ode, the chorus do not comment on the judge himself or on his verdict as such. They just deliver their own trenchant observations on the contestants. Those observations accordingly have the theatrical impact of an independent voice, not an echo of the voice of Dionysus himself. To say that the chorus 'explains why Dionysus preferred Aeschylus' is to make a very big leap indeed.⁹⁴ If Dionysus could not explain his own decision, why should anyone else be able to do so?

The chorus's comments do, however, have one important feature in common with Dionysus' decision: they come, so to speak, out of the blue. Apart from an expression of surprise at the idea that anyone could find fault with Aeschylus' beautiful lyrics (1251–60; probably two versions of the same song),⁹⁵ their earlier contributions were largely notable for a refusal to take sides in the competition. Where positive terms were used by the chorus, they were distributed more or less equally between the tragedians; where negative hints

⁹⁴ Dover 1993: 380; cf. 1993 20, 'the chorus... tell us why Aeschylus has won', a subtly different (but also misleading) formulation: note the criticism of Dover in Schwinge (2002: 41 n. 61). Silk (2000a: 366–7) stresses the abrupt discontinuity involved in the chorus's final contribution; cf. Paulsen 2000: 87.

⁹⁵ Particularly notable here is the description of Aeschylus as 'this Bacchic lord': see Dover 1993: 343, Sommerstein 1996: 268–9 for its relevance to the textual problem of doublets at 1251–60. Cf. Lada-Richards 1999: 242–4, but she fallaciously uses the phrase to give Aeschylus an advantage over Euripides in his relationship to 'Dionysus' within *Frogs*.

were dropped, they were not directed at just one of them.⁹⁶ The resoundingly partisan feelings announced in the chorus's final song therefore involve an abrupt change of tone and emphasis, if not exactly (as in Dionysus' case) a change of heart. And there is a further factor too. In dispensing both praise and blame, the chorus appear to smudge some of the very lines of demarcation and categories of evaluation which the tragedians and their poetic personalities had earlier served to establish.

In characterizing Aeschylus' virtues (or, strictly speaking, the virtues he exemplifies), the chorus start by implicitly ascribing to him 'meticulous acumen' or 'precise astuteness', *ξύνεσιν ἡκριβωμένην* (1483, with the cognate adjective, *συνετός*, reinforcing the ascription at the end of the strophe, 1491). At the outset of the contest the chorus had implied that both playwrights possessed this attribute (see the adjective *συνετός* at 876). It may seem hardly troubling in itself that they should now regard it as the prerogative of the victor. However, we earlier heard Euripides (but never Aeschylus) explicitly lay claim to such astuteness on two occasions, first invoking it as a sort of private deity (893) and later associating it with the rationalistic subtleties of thought on which he prides himself (957).⁹⁷ Still, one might think, why should the chorus not reappropriate for Aeschylus a poetic excellence which Euripides had (bogusly) tried to claim for himself? What makes the chorus's description at 1483 less easy to explain away is that they underline Aeschylean astuteness with a participial adjective which unmistakably evokes precise, painstaking attention to fine detail—not only, again, the kind of thing previously characteristic of Euripides but, unlike the flexible category of astuteness, something ostensibly incompatible with the characterization of Aeschylus (grandiose, stormy, belligerent) that dominated the whole contest. One commentator, noticing the anomaly, has gone so far as to speculate that 'many spectators may not instantly realize that it is now, paradoxically, Aeschylus who is being praised for these qualities!'⁹⁸ It is almost as

⁹⁶ See my earlier comments, 117–18, 122, 132–3 above. Treu (1999: 42–3) fails to give full weight to all the relevant evidence and thereby misrepresents the chorus's relationship to the contest prior to their final song.

⁹⁷ Dio Chrys. 52.11 ascribes *σύνεσις* to Euripides in a passage which contrasts his qualities with those of Aeschylus; directly or indirectly, this surely reflects the influence of *Frogs* itself on the later critical tradition: cf. Hunter 2009: 39–48 for one view of the relationship between the two works.

⁹⁸ Sommerstein 1996: 294. Battisti (1990: 9–10) tries to match Aeschylus with *σύνεσις* qua exclusive, aristocratic 'intelligence', and Euripides with a quasi-sophistic

though the chorus have let their attention wander a little, an impression perhaps strengthened by the fact that they also use of Aeschylus a verb, *φρονεῖν*, 'think' or 'reflect' (1485), which was used in the contest twice (and only) by Euripides (962, 971). Even when they appear to pick up the theme of the preceding scene by anticipating the good things Aeschylus will bring back to his fellow-citizens, their breezy phrases, including a reference to Aeschylus' 'kinsmen and friends' (1489) for which the contest itself contained no prompting, betray a rather indiscriminate mood of celebration. All in all, the chorus's gusto in the strophe conveys no firm grasp of the issues that were at stake between the tragedians and sheds no light on what it might be that is supposed to make Aeschylus a worthy victor.⁹⁹

There are oddities in the antistrophe too, where the chorus picture Euripides (by implication) sitting and chattering with Socrates, 'rejecting the art of the muses (*mousikê*) and neglecting the great importance of tragedy's art' (1493–5). Wasting time like this 'on pretentious discussions (*ἐπὶ σεμνοῖσιν λόγοισιν*) and scrapings of clapping (*σκαριφησμοῖσι λήρων*)'¹⁰⁰ is the life of a madman', they conclude (1496–9). Rousing no-nonsense sentiments, for sure, and sufficiently acerbic to have appealed to Nietzsche, who took his cue in part from this passage, as I mentioned at the start of the chapter, when he developed his conception of Euripides and Socrates as the rationalist destroyers of authentic tragedy. One curiosity, however, is that the chorus again give a markedly different nuance to a term found earlier in the contest: *σεμνός* (1496), translated above as 'pretentious', occurred (including its compounds) four times during the competition in connection with either Aeschylus' aloof

intelligence 'common to all men': but this takes no account of the connotations of *ἡκριβωμένην*, and given the context (including the song's antistrophe) it makes for an odd way of celebrating Aeschylus' victory. This is one reason why Jedrekiewicz (2010) removes reference to Aeschylus and Euripides from the song, turning it into an (implausibly self-righteous) proclamation of the political values Aristophanes supposedly offers his own audience.

⁹⁹ Möllendorff (1996–7: 149–50) takes Aristophanes to offer a 'new', utopian Aeschylus who combines the (previously) Aeschylean and Euripidean in one; cf. Möllendorff 2002: 162–4. I would prefer to say that the play exercises a comic freedom to subvert its own distinctions. I cannot agree with those, e.g. Zimmermann 1984–7: ii. 162, who find a strongly 'cultic' tone in 1481–99.

¹⁰⁰ *λήρος*, 'drivel' or 'nonsense', was associated in the contest itself more with Aeschylus (923, 945, 1005; cf. n. 49 above) than with Euripides (1136).

persona or his lofty ideal of tragedy.¹⁰¹ Like many adjectives, *σεμνός* possesses both negative and positive connotations. It is not hard to see how the chorus are using it at *Frogs* 1496 to predicate portentous, self-important seriousness of the discussions of Socrates and his friends. But it is still somewhat strange that the word should be chosen for abstruse Socratic conversations with which Euripides is implicitly associated when the play has stamped it with such strongly Aeschylean overtones. Furthermore, the whole image of Euripides as a sort of closet Socratic, while found elsewhere in Old Comedy (in fact, probably an old joke in the genre by this date) and evidently one way of symbolizing Euripides' alleged rationalism,¹⁰² is out of kilter with the broader characterization of him earlier in *Frogs* itself, where his credentials as a crowd-pleasing demagogue (771–6), a 'democrat' (952), and a poet who gives a voice even to women and slaves (949–50), were to the fore.¹⁰³

The chorus's vignette of Euripides in their final song is a zestfully *ad hominem* swipe at a purportedly esoteric thinker, but it cannot be fully harmonized with the complex depiction of Euripidean tragedy in the body of the contest itself, where even the playwright's intellectualizing traits were linked to his supposedly populist mission of teaching the Athenians *en masse* the power of analytical thinking (esp. 956–8). Those confident of reading Aristophanes' own mind can

¹⁰¹ See 833, 1004, 1020, 1061. Ironically, the Platonic Socrates himself uses the same adj. to characterize the pretentious grandeur of tragedy, *Grg.* 502b; cf. Crates fr. 28, *Arist. Poet.* 4.1449a20–1, 22.1458a21, with Conti Bizzarro 1999: 116–17.

¹⁰² See esp. *Ar. fr.* 392 (from the first version of *Clouds*), Callias fr. 15, Telecleides fr. 41–2. Wildberg (2006) reassesses the evidence for the (real) relationship between Euripides and Socrates; in citing *Frogs* 1491–9 (p. 26), he ignores the discrepancies with earlier parts of the play. Cf. Arrighetti (2006: 168–80), who is too confident of reading Aristophanes' own 'convictions' from the song, and Brancacci (2008: 35–55). It is tendentious of Nails (2006: 13) to adduce this passage of *Frogs* as referring to 'young [*sic*] ... Socrates-imitators' who are accused of 'attacking the poets'. For Euripides' appearance in Aeschines Soc.'s dialogue *Miltiades*, see *SSR VI A* 76, 79–80 (= *POxy.* XXXIX 2889–90), with Slings 1975: 304–8. Koller (1963: 88–9) unpersuasively takes *Frogs* 1491–9 to reflect a wider *sophistic* rejection of older ideals of musical culture. The dubious [*Pl.*] *Clit.* 407c *could* be read as evidence for a perception of Socrates as sceptical about the value of musico-poetic education.

¹⁰³ A discrepant strand is Euripides' claim of Theramenes and Clitophon as disciples at 967: both were associated with ('moderate') oligarchic politics in 411 (and subsequently in 404). Whatever this means for Euripidean 'politics', it provides no help with 1491–9: Clitophon's appearances in Plato's dialogues hardly suggest he was close to Socrates; 'the Socratic Cleitophon', Hubbard 1991: 210, distorts this point. Cf. Nails 2002: 102–3.

take such inconsistencies as part-and-parcel of a 'real' rejection of Euripides that somehow points, if rather belatedly, to the inner message of the contest. But anyone inclined to treat the second half of *Frogs*, on its own elaborate yet fluid terms, as a comic version of the dilemmas and instabilities of (tragic) poetics will find in the strophic song at 1482–99 something much less than a convincing synthesis of everything that has gone before. The song stands, I suggest, as a light-headed *kômos* in which perceived friends and foes alike are given loose, broad-brush treatment—a pairing of congratulations and insults invigorated with energetic pithiness, but one which does nothing to resolve the paradoxes, problems, and uncertainties that Aristophanes has woven into the fabric of the contest.

The force of that point carries over to the exodos of *Frogs*. Part of the spirit of the scene of departure is a celebration of comic wishful thinking ('utopianism' seems too weighty a term), performed with a choreographed pageantry which would allow any spectator to enjoy its fantasized uplift. As with other Aristophanic endings, gratifying sentiment and a kind of hazy nostalgia prevail over any cogent organization of ideas;¹⁰⁴ there is also a characteristic juxtaposition of contrasting registers, with lofty expressions of patriotic hope jostled by gestures of coarse physicality and bluntness. Anyone who tries to piece together a sustainable 'meaning' from the atmosphere of the closing spectacle should be struck above all by a trio of disorientating considerations. The first is that the imagined return of Aeschylus to Athens is linked to the motif of 'saving the city' (1501) which Dionysus had introduced in line 1419 but which had conspicuously *not* enabled him to arrive at his verdict in the contest; what's more, that motif seems less important to the far-from-dignified Aeschylus himself, who is obsessed not with what awaits him back in Athens but with the pettily vindictive thought of making sure Euripides ('that scoundrel, liar, and buffoon', 1520–1) does not sit on his throne during his absence. The second consideration is the anomaly of the chorus's conviction that Aeschylus' return carries with it the prospect of an end to the war ('we shall escape from the

¹⁰⁴ Cf. the apposite comments of Stanford 1958: 201. Nagy (1989: 68) also sees nostalgia in the outcome, but his characterization of it depends on a mirage, 'the undifferentiated Dionysiac essence of drama', allowing him to find more coherence in the verdict than I do. Scharffenberger (2007: esp. 245–9), sees *Frogs* as a kind of *critique* of cultural nostalgia.

grievous clashes of war; let Cleophon and others carry on fighting', 1531–3). Can they really be thinking of the Aeschylus who had earlier proclaimed himself the supreme tragedian of rampant militarism, the author of plays 'full of Ares' which would have made anyone who saw them 'desire to be warlike' (1021–2), and who boasted of having taught the Athenians 'to desire always to defeat their enemies' (1026–7)?¹⁰⁵

The final consideration which undercuts any categorical reading of the play's exodos is that as the torchlit parade leads Aeschylus out of Hades, the god of theatre himself has nothing left to say. We shall never know what Aristophanes and/or his producer Philonides intended Dionysus to be doing as he (presumably)¹⁰⁶ departed in the company of Aeschylus at the end of *Frogs*. We could choose to imagine him (and hypothetical stagings are always themselves acts of interpretation) as joining the procession with some solemnity, perhaps. But we might prefer to picture him as contributing something more like a comastic sideshow to it. Either way, his silence shows at any rate that he no longer faces the challenge of needing to explain the love of poetry which had sent him down to Hades in the first place. And the one safe conclusion we can draw is that it is comedy—with its own peculiar way of making poetry out of the headiness of the present moment—which has released him from that obligation.

¹⁰⁵ Sommerstein (1996: 291) takes Aeschylus' advice at 1463–5 to imply that 'the way to save Athens is by fighting', a proposition hard to square with the chorus's talk of escaping from 'grievous armed combat' at 1531–2 (or, equally, their dismissal of Cleophon's desire to fight, 1532–3): see Sommerstein (1996: 298) for an attempt to cope with this tension, also noticed by Dover (1993: 73); the point is ignored by Hubbard 1991: 208 n. 136 ('the final lines... make it quite clear that Aristophanes favored the recent peace proposals').

¹⁰⁶ For contrasting views of whether Dionysus (and Xanthias too) needs to be present on stage, see Dover 1993: 381–2 (where 'unseasonably' strikes me as curious), Sommerstein 1996: 295; cf. Sommerstein 2009: 245.

To Banish or Not to Banish? Plato's Unanswered Question about Poetry

*ὁ αὐτὸς οὖν λόγος καὶ τὸν Ὅμηρον ἡμᾶς ἐκβάλλειν
τῆς πολιτείας καὶ τὸν Πλάτωνα αὐτόν . . .*

So the same reasoning would require us to banish not
only Homer but Plato himself from the state . . .

(Proclus)¹

INTERROGATING POETRY'S MEANING: THE APOLOGY AND ION

Plato's relationship to poetry constitutes a challenge and a provocation for his admirers just as much as for his detractors. At least as early as Aristotle's arrival at the Academy, and possibly even earlier, the attitudes to poetry displayed in Plato's dialogues became a cause of controversy. They have remained so ever since. In antiquity, a series of debates developed among philosophers, rhetoricians, and scholars about the significance of poetry for both the contents and the literary form of Plato's writings. The interplay between those two levels of the dialogues was itself a topic of contention. Plato's critics (among them the Epicurean Colotes, the rhetorician Dionysius of Halicarnassus, and 'Heraclitus' author of the allegorizing treatise

¹ *In R.* 1.161.9–11 Kroll; cf. *ibid.* 1.118.29–119.2 ('the same argument requires us either to banish these [images of Hades in Plato] as well or not to fault Homer's statements').

Homeric Questions) condemned him for hypocrisy, sometimes even for 'plagiarism', in making his own use of poetic features—of style, imagery, dramatization, and myth—in works which nonetheless allowed negative judgements to be expressed about the greatest of all Greek poets, Homer.² Plato's admirers, on the other hand (among them Panaetius, Maximus of Tyre, and the author of the treatise *On the Sublime*), saw in his work a stance of creative emulation towards poetry. When Longinus, for instance, calls Plato the most Homeric of all Greek writers, interpreting his indebtedness to Homer not as 'theft' but as that of a conscious 'rival' (ἀνταγωνιστής) of the poet, he is not only countering existing charges of plagiarism against the philosopher but also implicitly affirming that Plato cannot count as a mere detractor or repudiator of Homeric epic.³

The challenge involved in making sense of Plato's relationship to poetry found its most extensive and intricate response in Proclus' remarkable commentary on the *Republic*, where an elaborate attempt to defend Homer against apparent Platonic strictures, together with an equally elaborate attempt to do justice to the poet in Plato himself, produced two supreme gestures of paradox. The first is Proclus' conversion of the description of Homer at *Republic* 10.595d as 'teacher of the tragedians' into a formulation which makes Homer 'the teacher not only of tragedy but also of Plato's own entire mimetic enterprise and philosophical vision'.⁴ And in keeping with this thesis

² Arist. *Metaph.* 991a20–2~1079b24–6 finds 'poetic metaphors' clouding Platonist talk of Forms (cf. Arist. fr. 862 Gigon=73 Rose: Plato's writing midway between poetry and prose); see Halliwell (2006b) for a larger Aristotelian perspective on the dialogues. Procl. *In R.* 2.105.23–106.14 Kroll (cf. 1.118–19) cites Colotes' critique of the myth of Er as pseudo-tragic. Other germane critiques of Plato include Dion. Hal. *Pomp.* 1 (750–2), *Dem.* 5–7 (in part = Demetr. Phal. fr. 170 Wehrli 1968), Heraclitus, *Quaest. Hom.* 4, 17.4–18.1 (cf. 76–79.1).

³ Longinus, *Subl.* 13.3–4 (cf. n. 8 below), with Russell 1964: 116–18; ἀνταγωνιστής echoes Plato's own use (for philosopher-poets) at *Leg.* 7.817b. But *Subl.* 32.7 concedes that Plato's tropes sometimes turn him into a 'mad poet'. Panaetius called Plato 'Homerum philosophorum': Cic. *Tusc.* 1.79 = Panaetius frs. 56, 83 van Straaten. For Maximus of Tyre's attitudes, see esp. *Diss.* 17 (17.3: 'it is surely possible both to honour Plato's works and to admire Homer'), 26.2–3 Trapp. Other passages relevant to ancient debates about Plato's relationship to poetry include Dio Chrys. 36.26–7, 53.2–6, Athen. xi 505b–507e, Longinus, *Subl.* 32.7–8 (reporting the mocking views of Caecilius and others). Cf. Weinstock 1927: esp. 137–53, Walsdorff 1927, Gudeman 1934: 88–9.

⁴ ἀλλ' οὐ τραγωδίας μόνον ἐστὶν διδάσκαλος... ἀλλὰ καὶ τῆς Πλάτωνος ἀπάσης πραγματείας τῆς μιμητικῆς καὶ τῆς φιλοσόφου θεωρίας: Procl. *In R.* 1.196.9–13 Kroll, with Halliwell 2002a: 323–34 for the background to this remark.

of the intersection of philosophy and poetry in Plato himself, Proclus takes the even bolder step indicated in my epigraph above: wrestling with the *Republic's* critiques of poetry, he twice ponders the thought that the logic of the argument, if followed through, 'would require us to banish not only Homer but Plato himself from the state'. If poetry *were* to be exiled from the philosophical life, which is not a completely straightforward proposition for Proclus, Plato would have to go with it. We still have something to learn from Proclus on this subject—not, perhaps, from the labyrinth of his hermeneutic codes and manœuvres (which partly involve reading Homer through Plato, and Plato through Homer), but at any rate from the spirit in which he recognizes that there is more to Plato's relationship to poetry than poetry's literal or final expulsion from the city or the soul.⁵

Such a recognition occupies a place in a wider tradition of responses to Plato not only in antiquity but also in two formative periods of modernity, the Renaissance and the era of Romanticism—two periods, not accidentally, in which the influences of a reinterpreted Platonism on literary and artistic culture found it possible to flourish. When, for example, Sir Philip Sidney, echoing earlier continental theorists, decreed that Plato ('of all philosophers . . . the most poetical') had no quarrel with poetry *per se* (he proposed to banish 'the abuse, not the thing'), he was giving telescoped expression to a sense that there is more to Platonic arguments on the subject than a gesture of unqualified repudiation.⁶ Such lines of interpretation, which saw a double-voiced quality, a duality of indebtedness and questioning, in Plato's relationship to poetry, reached a climax during the period of Romanticism, especially in Germany and England. One of the *Athenaeum Fragments* of Friedrich Schlegel, the most fervent Platonist of German Romanticism, provides a convenient summation of this direction of thought: 'Plato is more against poets than against poetry; he believed philosophy to be the boldest dithyramb and the most harmonious music. Epicurus is the real enemy of fine art, for he wants to extirpate imagination and limit himself to

⁵ For a fuller account of Proclus' hermeneutic enterprise, see Lamberton 1986: 162–232.

⁶ Sidney, *Defence of Poesy*: quotations from Duncan Jones 1989: 238 (ll. 1072–3), 239 (l. 1129). Sidney's position depends on the assumption that the model of divine inspiration in Plato's *Ion* (see 166–79 below) reveals the philosopher's truest view: a common Renaissance position, to which Castelvetro 1978–9: i. 91–3, tr. in Bongiorno 1984: 37–8, is a notable exception.

sense-perception.⁷ With pregnant emphasis, Schlegel declares his conviction that negative remarks on poetry in the dialogues need to be contextualized within the framework of a larger Platonic sensibility, including the poetic and imaginative features which make Plato himself a supreme artist-philosopher, a status most Romantics had no hesitation in ascribing to him. Even the arch-antiplatonist Nietzsche, speaking aphoristically of 'Plato versus Homer' as 'the consummate, the purest antagonism', retains a strong feel for the dialogues' active engagement with poetic models, as well as for what Nietzsche considered the 'corrupted artist' in Plato's own nature.⁸

Despite the long history, merely sampled above, of an awareness of complexity in Plato's relationship to poetry, modern scholarly orthodoxy in this area has often been reductive and rigid.⁹ There now exists a dominant consensus, found not only in specialist literature on Plato but in a much broader body of discourse on the history of philosophy, literary criticism/theory, art theory, and aesthetics, that Plato was consistently, uncompromisingly 'hostile' to poetry *per se* (and even to 'art' more generally). For such orthodoxy, the hypothetical banishment of the greatest poets from the ideal city of the *Republic* is the supreme, unequivocal symbol of Plato's verdict on the subject, his definitive pronouncement of condemnation. A substantial part of the present chapter will be devoted to tackling head-on this reading of the banishment motif by showing that it ignores crucial signals of

⁷ *Athenäumsfragmente* 450, Eichner 1967: 255: 'Plato hat es mehr gegen die Poeten als gegen die Poesie; er hielt die Philosophie für den kühnsten Dithyrambus und für die einstimmigste Musik. Epikur ist eigentlicher Feind der schönen Kunst: denn er will die Fantasie ausrotten und sich bloß an den Sinn halten.' I take 'einstimmigste', 'most harmonious', to involve a kind of pun on the senses 'one-voiced' and 'unified'.

⁸ 'Plato gegen Homer: das ist der ganze, der echte Antagonismus': Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, iii. 25 (in Nietzsche 1988: v. 402). Nietzsche may have had at the back of his mind Longinus' description of Plato as Homer's *ἀνταγωνιστής*, as well as Plato's own use of that term for poet-philosophers in *Laws* (n. 3 above). Both Longinus and Nietzsche in turn prefigure Harold Bloom's concept of literary/cultural tradition as *agon*: cf. the reference to these predecessors in Bloom 1994: 6, with Bloom 2004: 31–78 for his own stimulating but diffuse rereading of the 'quarrel' between poetry and philosophy. For Nietzsche's recognition of Plato as 'artist', see e.g. *Birth of Tragedy*, 14 (Nietzsche 1988: i. 93), for the dialogues as the first novels, a view later echoed by Bakhtin: see Kurke 2006: 18–19; cf. Ch. 1 n. 19.

⁹ Notable exceptions in the recent literature include Asmis (1992a), Janaway (1995), Burnyeat (1999), Giuliano (2005). Of older scholarship, Greene (1918) is refreshingly non-doctrinaire; Gilbert (1939) denies that Plato held a purely negative view of poetry, but his attempt to turn him into a Crocean (15–19) is misguided.

Platonic ambivalence towards poetry. It is my contention more generally that older traditions of reading Plato were right to find in his dealings with poetry an irreducibly complex dialectic of attitudes. The dialogues betray a recurrent tension, embodied above all in the persona of Socrates, between attraction and resistance to the possibilities of poetic experience.

Although this tension assumes various forms, it is connected at root to the competing demands of, on the one hand, discursive reason (whose goal is the definition and understanding of truth) and, on the other, certain kinds of intensely heightened and transformed consciousness (*erôs* and responsiveness to beauty being paradigms of this) which are not wholly amenable to rational analysis. I would argue, indeed, that those competing demands, together with the aspiration to find a way of unifying them, run through Plato's conception of philosophy as a whole, producing and shaping the distinctive combinations of rationality and imagination, the analytical and the visionary, which characterize his own extraordinary writing. That, however, is too large a thesis to pursue fully in the present context. My immediate aim is to make a detailed case for seeing the core motivation behind Plato's dealings with poetry not as a severe, narrow hostility but as something more like a persistent, unresolved ambivalence.

Some of the complications involved in Plato's relationship to poetry can be glimpsed, in embryo as it were, in the well-known passage of the *Apology* in which Socrates recounts how, after antagonizing individual politicians by exposing their (self-) ignorance, he did much the same with various poets, including tragedians and composers of dithyramb.¹⁰ The passage is more enigmatic than often supposed; it requires but partly thwarts close scrutiny. Socrates starts by 'taking up' and reading the texts (literally) of poems he thinks to be particularly 'well-wrought' or 'highly elaborated' (*μάλιστα πεπραγματεύσθαι*): this apparently implies a carefully weighed judgement of poetic quality, a perception of fine compositional proficiency, though of a kind Socrates does not pause (or

¹⁰ *Ap.* 22a–c: see the commentary in Lanata 1963: 284–8, as well as Stokes 1997: 120–1, Heitsch 2004: 81–6. For the conjunction of dithyramb and tragedy, cf. *Grg.* 501e–502b. (Platonic works are mostly cited in the present chapter without author's name.) Goldman (2009: 457) goes too far in taking the main target of Socrates' critique to be the poets' social pretensions, though he is right that poetry *per se* is not discarded.

attempt) to explain.¹¹ But why does Socrates need to interrogate the poets themselves? Why is he not satisfied with the qualities he seems already to discern, from his position as careful reader, within their best works? Could it be that the qualities he sees for himself are in some sense formal, and that he wishes to get beyond these to the more difficult understanding of semantic ‘content’? Or is the point rather a matter of the difference between superficial and underlying levels of meaning?

One way of trying to answer these questions is to consider Socrates’ quest to test the Delphic oracle’s startling pronouncement that he himself is the wisest of humans (a construal which is already an inference on his part from the strict statement that no human is wiser than him, 21a). This quest involves a search for something more than a domain-specific expertise: a search, in fact, for a general human wisdom or expertise (*sophia*)—equivalent to a knowledge of ‘human and political excellence’ (cf. 20b)—from which Socrates and others might ‘learn’ or ‘understand’ (*μανθάνειν*) how to live (22b). In the case of the poets the quest takes the form of an insistent demand that they should *interpret* their own works, supplementing the words of the poems themselves with a further, hermeneutical discourse: Socrates kept asking them ‘what they were saying’ or ‘what they meant’ (*τί λέγοιεν*, 22b).¹² He treats their poems, then, in the same way as he treated Apollo’s oracle, of which he had asked himself: ‘whatever does the god mean?’, *τί ποτε λέγει ὁ θεός* . . . (21b, cf. 21e, 23a).¹³

That parallelism (which makes the process of interpretation straddle the oral–written distinction) confirms that at any rate part of what is

¹¹ *πραγματεύεσθαι* denotes occupying oneself repeatedly or intensively with something (cf. *Ap.* 20c); it can therefore mark out specialist expertise: e.g. *Resp.* 6.510c. It is applied specifically to the composition of (dramatic) poetry at *Ar. Clouds* 526 (with 524 for emphasis on intensive effort); cf. LSJ s.v., II 4. The verb is used of strong philosophical endeavour (oral, written, or purely mental) at e.g. *Phdo* 77d, 96a, 99d, 100b, *Prm.* 129e, *Tht.* 187a. For ‘taking up’ (*ἀναλαμβάνειν*) poetic texts, cf. *Resp.* 10.606e. Note Socrates’ claim to have devoted close attention to Simonides’ ode to Scopas at *Prt.* 339b–c, with *Xen. Mem.* 1.6.14 for another glimpse of Socrates as reader.

¹² Reeve 1989: 12, ‘I examined them on what they said’, loses the indirect question at 22b and thereby weakens the force of Socrates’ probing; Reeve 1989: 38 has the correct construal.

¹³ Cf. Socrates’ attempt to establish the meaning (*τί λέγοι*) of the dream injunction to ‘make music’, *Phdo* 60e, and his (metaphorical) need of ‘divination’ (*μαντεία*) to understand Diotima’s meaning at *Symp.* 206b. The process of interpretation is sometimes called *ὑπολαμβάνειν*, to grasp what lies ‘under’ the words: see esp. *Resp.* 4.424c.

at stake in both cases is the difference between the *prima-facie*, surface meaning of words and something which counts as their deeper or fuller significance. There is nothing linguistically or semantically unclear about the statement that ‘no one is wiser than Socrates’, any more than there is with the proposition that justice is ‘paying each person what is owed to them’, a sentiment ascribed to Simonides in *Republic* 1 and about which Socrates also professes not to know what its author ‘means’ by it (ὅτι ποτέ λέγει).¹⁴ The function of interpretation, with poetry as with the oracle, must concern the implications, consequences, or wider ethical force of what is said: a force which, in the case of Apollo at least, may be partly cryptic, encoded in a sort of riddle or enigma (‘whatever does the god mean? whatever is the point of his riddle?’, 21b, τί ποτε αἰνίττεται;), yet which must in principle be open, Socrates assumes, to discursive enquiry.¹⁵ What’s more, while the case of Apollo’s oracle shows that Socrates’ hermeneutic exigency might apply itself to individual, discrete utterances, the interrogation of poets reported in the *Apology* suggests a concern with larger structures of meaning, including whole works. Nor, where poetry is concerned (here too the case of the oracular god might be different), does it seem that Socrates is simply trying to get *behind* the works to the separate intentions of their authors.¹⁶ He appears to find something uncertain about his experience and understanding of the poems themselves. And he looks to their makers not to disclose a prior conception of meaning but to show him how to identify more securely the meanings

¹⁴ *Resp.* 1.331e; cf. the provisional conclusion that Simonides ‘riddled’ (ῥνίξατο) his meaning, with the next note. In the discussion of a different Simonides poem in *Prt.*, Socrates plays for time to puzzle over ‘what the poet meant’ (339e).

¹⁵ The language of ‘riddling’ (αἰνίττεσθαι etc.) is sometimes used of poetry itself; cf. Struck 2005: 156–64, Ford 2002: 72–6 (misreporting the Derveni papyrus’s verb-form, αἰνίττεσθαι). In *Ap.* Socrates ignores the possibility, voiced at [Pl.] *Alc.* II 147b–d, that poets might not *mean* their ‘wisdom’ to be obvious; cf. the Heracliteans (of dubious historicity?) who refuse to be pinned down to a stable interpretation of their beliefs, *Tht.* 179e–180b. Also relevant here is *Leg.* 4.719c–e (cf. nn. 25, 41 below), where the Athenian admits that the poet’s mimetic projection of views onto different characters makes it impossible for him to maintain a single viewpoint.

¹⁶ Cf. *Phdr.* 275d, part of the famous critique of writing: the point there is not (simply) that the written word cannot tell its readers the prior/separate intentions of its author, but that there is something semantically elusive and resistant about a *logos* (just like a painting, *ibid.*) which one cannot engage in direct dialectic. Cf. *Phdr.* 278c–d for the requirement that the ‘philosophical’ poet (among others) must be able to face discursive questioning, *elenchos*, of his writing. At *Resp.* 1.338c Socrates (supposedly) does not understand Thrasymachus’ meaning and requires dialectic to probe it.

(supposedly) contained in the works. His own presumption, however, is that a satisfactory clarification of this kind would need to explain how the works are informed by an indispensable human wisdom or knowledge.

In following through the logic of this account we come up against uncertainty. Socrates tells the jury that he was disappointed in the poets: 'almost all those present', he claims, 'could have discussed the poets' works better than their own authors could'. Notice, in the first place, the contemptuous tone of this. Socrates engages in *conspicuous* interrogation and embarrassment of the poets, making it easy to see why he leaves the impression of having publicly shamed and antagonized them. He is not just politely requesting help with his understanding of their poems, but challenging and goading them in front of an audience. But on what basis does he deem their responses, of which he supplies no specimen, hopelessly unsatisfactory? Just as with his judgement of the 'well-wrought' compositional merits of the texts he selected, Socrates gives no indication of the standards he applied or from where he derived them.

Matters become more obscure still. Socrates draws the inference that the poets 'do not produce their poetry by expert knowledge (*sophia*) but by some kind of natural talent (*φύσει*) and in an inspired state of mind like that of seers and oracle-reciters, for these too say many beautiful things but have no *knowledge* of what they are saying'.¹⁷ Socrates, it now appears, is in a position to tell that there are 'many beautiful things' in the poems he is concerned with, but also that they are not put there with conscious knowledge by their authors. He cannot be suggesting by this that poets compose all their work in a kind of involuntary trance: not only has he already referred to the elaborately worked texts of the poems; he goes on to say that the poets' mistake was to convince themselves that 'because of their poetic activity (*poiêsis*) they were also the wisest [*or most knowledgeable*] of humans in other matters too' (22c). This formulation recurs

¹⁷ *ἐγγων οὖν αὖ καὶ περὶ τῶν ποιητῶν ἐν ἀλίγκῃ τοῦτο, ὅτι οὐ σοφία ποιοῖεν ἂ ποιοῖεν, ἀλλὰ φύσει τινὶ καὶ ἐνθουσιάζοντες ὥσπερ οἱ θεομάντεις καὶ οἱ χρησμοδοί· καὶ γὰρ οὗτοι λέγουσι μὲν πολλὰ καὶ καλά, ἴσασιν δὲ οὐδὲν ὧν λέγουσι: 22b–c.* Part, at least, of poets' natural abilities is presumably related to the 'natural' power of rhythm and melody (cf. *Resp.* 10.601a–b). I translate *καλός* as 'beautiful', unless otherwise noted, throughout this chapter, despite the well-known semantic issues involved: Dover (1974: 69–73) gives a good overview of usage. The problem of translation cannot be sidestepped by adopting a blander term like 'fine'.

in connection with the manual craftsmen at 22d, who probably include painters and sculptors (and conceivably instrumental musicians too), and it shows that, contrary to many readings of the passage, Socrates does not deny poets *technê* or craft-knowledge altogether: he implies that they have a skill or craft of *poiêsis* which is manifest in the verbal structures and textures of their works.¹⁸ What he questions is their possession of knowledge or wisdom of a more far-reaching kind, a kind which the poets' audiences might learn to bring to bear on their lives as a whole.

That cannot mean, however, that he thinks poets are clever with words but have nothing more to offer. He expressly admits that their works contain 'many beautiful things'. This phrase is somewhat formulaic, and it leaves aside the question of generic differences (would Socrates find the same kind of beauty in tragedy as in dithyramb?). But given the pairing with seers and oracle-reciters, the phrase seems to allow that poems may indeed contain significant, deeper truths.¹⁹ It is the possibility of uncovering such truths, but coupled with the poets' alleged inability to give a rational or discursive account of them, which generates the hypothesis of creative inspiration, whether natural/instinctive or perhaps divinely induced.²⁰ So we are

¹⁸ Murray (1996: 10) infers that Socrates denies the poets *technê* altogether from the fact that he recognizes the manual craftsmen as 'wiser' than himself (σοφώτεροι, 22d: in effect, more expert, Ch. 3 n. 29) in relation to their specialized activities. But the following sentence (22d4–8) shows that Socrates does not draw a complete contrast between poets and manual craftsmen: 'the same mistake' (d5) entails that poets too have fine *technê*, and this must be implicit at 22c5–6 as well; the point is often missed, e.g. Brickhouse and Smith 1989: 97, 254. Cf. n. 41 below. For instrumental musicians as χειροτέχναι, cf. Pl. *Plt.* 304b.

¹⁹ In the partly parallel passage at *Meno* 99b–d (cf. n. 20) inspiration leads soothayers, as well as politicians (*sic!*) and poets, to say 'many true things' (ἀληθῆ καὶ πολλά). Cf. *Leg.* 7.802a for the existence of 'many beautiful poems'. πολλά καὶ καλά occurs in description of lyric poetry, including dithyramb, at Ar. *Birds* 918; [Pl.] *Hipparchus* 229a uses it of poems inscribed on herms. Such phrases are common in Plato (and elsewhere) as designators of excellence in any field: in addition to the repetition (of the craftsmen) at *Ap.* 22d2, see *Euthph.* 13e–14a for general applicability; cf. *Tht.* 150d (the ideas Socrates' midwifery induces in others), *Ion* 530d, 541e–542a (Ion's putative *interpretations* of poetry), *Resp.* 10.599b (real achievements in contrast to poetic mimesis). Given *Ap.* 22c–d, it is worth noting the association with true oracles at [Dem.] *Epist.* 1.16. At *Prt.* 339b, Socrates accepts that poetry cannot be judged 'beautifully composed' (καλῶς πεποιησθαι) independently of its meaning.

²⁰ Unlike the inspiration of *Meno* 99b–d (n. 19), which is contrasted with things acquired 'by nature' (98c–d, 99e), *Ap.* 22c allows a naturalist component to inspiration; cf. n. 25 below. *Phdo* 60e–61a, if counted as a case of inspiration, apparently amounts to a motivational impulse without further input from Apollo.

faced with a model of 'creativity', of how poets produce what they do, which Socrates does not trouble to spell out analytically but which involves a *combination* of the rational and the irrational: consciously controlled expertise (in the composition of verbal structures) and intuitive insight (in the expression of larger human meanings). Such a combination is not without traditional precedents. What appears puzzling, however, is the capacity of Socrates, the one who knows nothing except his own ignorance (but who also sometimes lays claim to a kind of divinely prompted intuition of his own), to pronounce many things in poetry excellent, i.e. 'beautiful', while exposing an inability on the part of the poets themselves to explain in the fullest sense (that is, in a way fully accountable to discursive philosophical questioning) what they, or their works, mean.²¹ It is hardly surprising, then, that Socrates' audiences came to the conclusion that he himself *purported* to be 'wise' in the things about which he persistently interrogated others (23a).

So the description of this critical scene leaves us with a paradox. Socrates undertakes an almost scornful questioning of the poets' pretensions and supposed wisdom; nevertheless, he does not suggest that their *works* are without value. While he indicates that those works are of uncertain meaning (his observation that virtually anyone might give a better explanation than the authors themselves does not entail that others actually provided the complete interpretations he was looking for), his talk of the 'many beautiful things' they contain, some of which may even represent insights into the divine, shows that he is far from dismissing the works themselves as without important things to say. Later in the *Apology* itself, as it happens, Socrates has no difficulty in adducing an ethical paradigm from poetry: he appeals to the Iliadic Achilles as a specimen of virtuous and heroic disdain for death (28b–d). There seems to be no problem here for Socrates in identifying what the relevant passages of the *Iliad* 'say' or 'mean' (nor,

²¹ The Platonic Socrates applies no uniform hermeneutic to poetic texts; for a different view see Ledbetter 2003: chs. 4–5. The present passage dissociates meaning from authorial intention/control, while *Prt.* 347e, *Hp. min.* 365d seem to imply that authorial explanation would be the arbiter of meaning; cf. the imaginary interrogation of Tyrtaeus at *Leg.* 1.629–30. Much of the critique of poetry in *Resp.* 2–3 treats poetic significance without reference to authorial intention. Silk (1974: 234) somewhat simplifies this Platonic issue. The sweeping claim of Lamberton (1986: 21 n. 54) about this aspect of ancient literary theory is deficient, as well as appearing to misconceive the point of the so-called 'intentional fallacy'.

one might add, any uncertainty about his own knowledge of the ethical standard in question). Yet even if one puts aside doubts about the interpretation of Achilles' behaviour, which surely involves more than fearlessness in the face of death, the Iliadic example hardly demonstrates in broader terms how to bridge the gap opened by Socrates himself between the non-discursive experience of 'many beautiful things' in poetry and the discursive wisdom which would enable one to convert poetic meanings into principles to live by. Socrates (and Plato) leaves us rather disorientated about the relationship between poetic beauty and truth. All the more intriguing, then, that despite his disappointment with contemporary poets Socrates would be prepared 'to die many times' if the reward were to spend eternity arguing with figures like Homer and Hesiod, and with the heroes whose stories their works relate (41a-b).

The more one probes the description of Socrates' encounter with the poets at *Apology* 22a-c, the more uncertain it threatens to become. On a standard reading, Socrates' main point is the proposal that the good things in poetry are the result not of conscious skill but of some kind of creative intuition (a point which, from a different angle, might be thought a *favourable* judgement on poetry).²² But the thrust of the passage, as I have tried to show, must go further than that. Socrates does not himself explain how he recognizes 'many beautiful things' in poetry. Still less does he explain how he can recognize them without knowing (the whole of) what they mean.²³ The discursive failure of the poets is not just a failure on their part. It is a sign of something in poetry which resists fully rational analysis *by anyone*, since Socrates implies that neither he nor anyone else is properly capable of remedying the poets' own interpretative deficit: if anyone were, that person would presumably qualify as the possessor of the general human wisdom for which Socrates is

²² Tolstoy (1930: 194) effectively inverts Socrates' critique: if artists could explain their work discursively, they would do so; but this would mean there would then be no *need* for art, whose value for Tolstoy lies precisely in its ability to communicate (by 'feeling') what cannot be communicated any other way. Cf. *ibid.* 195-8, with my epigraph to Ch. 1, for Tolstoy's general repudiation of criticism and interpretation of art. A similar position in McGilchrist 1982: 67: 'The critic has nothing to add to the work of art.'

²³ Something similar applies to his references to poetic 'beauties', *καλά*, in the central portion of *Ion* (533e, 534a etc.), one of several reasons for reading *Ion* too as not carrying its whole meaning on the surface: see 166-79 below.

searching.²⁴ So the passage leaves uncertain not just the creative source of the valuable things in poetry, but what *constitutes* that value: more particularly, what the relationship is between an apprehension of 'beauty' in the experience of poetry and the possibility of giving a discursively adequate account of, in the deepest sense, the poetry's meaning.

In the context of the *Apology*, these uncertainties are only briefly aired as just one element in the larger story of Socrates' quest for wisdom (of truths to live by). But they recur more extensively in several other places in Plato's work, and the urgent question they raise—a question about the problem of making poetic value fully accountable to discursive understanding—forms one of the roots of the persistent engagement of philosophy with poetry in the Platonic dialogues. One place to turn for a fuller exploration of that question is the *Ion*, a work connected in several respects with the concerns of *Apology* 22a–c. What the two most importantly share is not, I submit, a straightforward proposal of a concept of poetic inspiration, something which is never unequivocally or consistently espoused in Plato.²⁵ Rather, both of them draw on the hypothesis of inspiration as part of a search for a rationalistic, discursive poetics, and both underline an awareness of essential elements in poetry which appear to resist or block that search.

²⁴ Cf. the famous discussion of Simon. 542 PMG at *Prt.* 339a–347e, where discursive analysis of poetry is presented (and parodied) as inconclusive and sophistic. Why should it be any different if the interpreters are the poets themselves?

²⁵ A useful *mise au point* of the issues, citing further scholarship, can be found in Murray (1996: 6–12, cf. 235–8), though her account of Plato's views on mimesis is somewhat schematic. I would stress the following. (i) *Ap.* 22b–c is ambiguous between a naturalist/intuitionist (*φύσις*-based: cf. Democr. B21 DK, with Brancacci 2007: 201–2) and a religious conception of inspiration (cf. *Leg.* 3.682a, with Saunders 1972: 13), whereas *Ion* posits exclusively divine agency and *Meno* (nn. 19–20 above) contrasts inspiration with 'nature'. (ii) *Ion* contrasts inspiration absolutely with *technê*, *Phdr.* 245a is more nuanced (*technê* is not sufficient), while *Leg.* 4.719c–d allows a *technê* of mimesis to coexist with the flow of inspiration: Murray (1996: 12, 238) overstates the irrationalist force of the last passage, ignoring the poet's example at 719d–e (which suggests that he uses a conscious mimetic intentionality then further filled out through inspiration); differently Leszl 2006a: 346–8. Cf. the combination of 'erotic' inspiration and *technê* in Agathon's speech at *Symp.* 196d–197b. (iii) There are reasons (see my text) for doubting the (total) 'sincerity' of Socrates in the middle section of *Ion*, and perhaps at *Meno* 99b–d too. (iv) The idea/possibility of inspiration is ignored in both the *Republic's* critiques of poetry (unless one takes *ἱερὸν*, 'sacred', 3.398a, to be a hint; cf. *Ion* 534b); it is wryly implied in the mock address to the Muses at 8.545d–e.

On the selective reading I shall present here, the *Ion* is more perplexing and aporetic than most scholars suppose. Superficially easy to follow, because of the heavily ironic treatment of Ion's seeming naivety and lack of self-knowledge, it is a work which touches on fundamentally challenging questions. The widely held view that the dialogue advances a 'Platonic theory' of poetic inspiration fails to grapple with the work's dialectical and thematic intricacies. The *Ion* entwines issues of poetic creation, performance, and interpretation in a manner which makes a consistent understanding of the dialogue itself very taxing. My own reading will trace in the work an irreducible tension between the rational, technical demands of a discursive poetics and the experienced immediacy of poetic imagination and emotion. This tension is dramatized by the division of roles ascribed to Ion himself. As a performer (or performative interpreter) of Homer, he is a role-playing actor who, on his own testimony, becomes vividly caught up in the imagined events of the poetry he recites. But as what I shall call a discursive or critical interpreter—someone, that is, who claims (at least at Socrates' prompting) to expound and interpret poems separately from their performance—he assumes responsibility for making rational sense of poetry and for expertly identifying what it has to tell its audiences.²⁶ However feebly incapable of coping with or reconciling this disjunction of roles Ion himself turns out to be, we need to see beyond the semi-comic

²⁶ Socrates' insistence that the good rhapsode must understand/interpret the poet's thought (530c) might in isolation refer to aspects of rhapsodic performance itself. But Ion takes it to imply *discursive* interpretation and therefore claims to 'speak exceptionally well' about Homer. Socrates readily accepts this. Despite moments of ambiguity, esp. 535a (where 'interpreters of interpreters' seems best to fit the rhapsodes' *performative* function), the dialogue as a whole requires a distinction between performance and discursive interpretation: Socrates denotes the latter with a varied vocabulary: *ἐκμανθάνειν* (530c: sliding from 'learn by heart' to 'understand thoroughly'; cf. Rijksbaron 2007: 120, with Ch. 6 n. 70), *συνιέναι* (530c: cf. Pl. *Prt.* 325e, 339a), *ἐρμηνεύς* (530c etc.), *γινώσκειν* (530c etc.), *διαγινώσκειν* (538c etc.), *ἐξηγεῖσθαι* (531a–b etc.), *κριτής* (532b; cf. Ch. 3 n. 10), *ἐπιστήμη* (532c etc.: cf. Niceratus at Xen. *Symp.* 4.6), *διακρίνειν* (538e, 539e), *ἐπαινεῖν* (536d etc.); Ion himself adds *κοσμεῖν* (530d, 'make attractive sense of?' cf. Ch. 2 nn. 97, 99). Herington (1985: 10), foregrounding the rhapsode–actor nexus (532d, 536a), seems to miss the role of discursive interpretation, while Leszl (2004: 196, 'the concern is with performance') erases it altogether; Schaper (1968: 23–4) tangles the issue. Kivy (2006: 9–10, 94–9) speculates that Ion's recitations were 'interlarded' with, even 'interrupted' by, his interpretations: this is less likely than separate presentation of commentary, whether alongside recitations or on different occasions. Cf. Graziosi (2002: 45–6) for possible competition between rhapsode–interpreters and other Homeric experts.

characterization of his complacency to the very real problems which the work uses him to expose.

The dialogue's frame of reference, as constructed by Socrates, incorporates highly polarized alternatives for the understanding of poetry. The first is a model of poetry as a cognitively functional, informative, instructive means of communication, overlapping at every point with the domain-specific knowledge of specialists such as doctors and generals. The second is a model of poetry as the voice of the divine ('the god himself speaks to us', *ὁ θεὸς αὐτός . . . φθέγγεται πρὸς ἡμᾶς*, 534d), vatically channelled through the mouthpiece of the human singer and experienced by those who come into contact with its imaginative-cum-emotional 'magnetism' as a kind of ecstasy or loss of self (see below). If the dialogue were a simple or complete repudiation of the first of these alternatives in favour of the second, it would be hard to explain why, after advancing a vibrant account of ecstatic transformation of mind in the middle of the work, Socrates then seems to abandon this idea (making no further reference or allusion to it until the very end) as he progresses through the third phase of his conversation with the rhapsode.

In fact, the design of the *Ion* as a sort of triptych is crucial to its philosophical import. In the first section (530a–533c), Socrates looks in vain for a rational account of Ion's putative skill (*technê*) and knowledge as a discursive interpreter of poetry; in the process, he significantly assumes the existence of, yet also neglects to identify, something that counts as 'the art of poetry as a whole' (*ποιητική . . . τὸ ὅλον*, 532c: see below). In the middle section of the work (533c–536d), he concludes that Ion's abilities as rhapsode cannot be a matter of rational art or expertise, and neither can the poet's: both are components of a chain of divine rapture which passes from Muse to poet, poet to rhapsode, and rhapsode to audience. Yet in the final section (536e–542b), Socrates returns to the investigation of both the rhapsode's and, obliquely, the poet's own claims to be a knowledgeable expert of some kind. The a–b–a structure strongly prompts one to think that the lyrical evocation of inspiration in the middle section may not be the ultimate or exclusive answer to all the puzzles raised. And even though the return to a search for a knowledge-based conception of the abilities of rhapsode and poet again ends in failure, any reader who feels a need to improve on Ion's own responses to Socrates may be encouraged by the dialogue's dialectical design to

look for alternative ways of unpicking and reconnecting its various strands.²⁷

Careful but not overconfident readers of *Ion* will notice that the work hints at more possibilities than Socrates' prima-facie line of argument follows through. They may also feel that, in part, the work toys with not just *Ion* but its own readers. For one thing, Socrates takes an early decision to probe *Ion's* talents as an interpreter of poetry while denying him a chance to *display* them (530d–531a): in a sense, therefore, readers are left in the dark about what they are trying to understand, even if, as we shall see, Socrates will offer a retrospective justification of this tactic near the end of the work.²⁸ It is striking, moreover, that Socrates, if not *Ion*, seems to be aware of conflicting alternatives. In the first part of the dialogue's triptych (530a–533c), Socrates apparently proceeds on the basis that a good interpreter of poetry would need to be expert in each and every domain of knowledge (such as arithmetic and medicine) which has an independent existence outside poetry but might be reflected within its images and narratives of life. This presupposes that poetic subject matter is nothing but a collection of things each of which belongs to a specific domain of knowledge or expertise. That supposition makes absurd, however, the idea of being an expert interpreter of poetry as such: the interpreter would need to be expert in *everything*, since

²⁷ Unlike many, Janaway (1992) offers a reading of the dialogue which tries to preserve a place for *both* inspiration and *technê* in poetry. His position is rejected by Stern-Gillet (2004: 182–90), who trenchantly criticizes 'Romantic' approaches to *Ion* but over-reads the work as an 'attack on poetry' (a common verdict, e.g. Graziosi 2002: 183) and treats the premise of 'the art of poetry as a whole' (532c) as a merely 'tactical' assumption (189), as does Rijksbaron 2007: 10. For other discussions see Kahn 1996: 104–13, Ledbetter 2003: 78–98, Griswold 2004: §2, Giuliano 2005: 141–7, Konstan 2005b, several contributions to Destrée and Herrmann 2011, and Liebert 2010b, who makes a stimulating case for seeing the dialogue as subtextually prompting recognition of the need for a concept of fiction to make sense of poetry's discursive status.

²⁸ We cannot just assume that Plato's readers must have known the kinds of thing *Ion* (whose historicity is uncertain) would say about Homer. Since *Ion* claims to have distinctive interpretations (530c–d), the 'suppression' of them complicates the reader's perspective. We do not know e.g. whether *Ion* might advance allegorical interpretations (which would change the hermeneutic framework substantially); his references to Metrodorus and Stesimbrotus at 530c–d are at least compatible with this: see Struck 2004: 43, with Richardson 1975 on the intellectual background; cf. esp. *Crat.* 407a–b, *Resp.* 2.378d (with Ch. 7 n. 42), *Tht.* 153d–e for Platonic references to allegorical interpretation, with Ford 2002: 85–8. But most rhapsodes, it seems, did not deal in allegoresis: Xen. *Symp.* 3.6.

Socrates himself suggests that poetry can range across the affairs of the entire cosmos (from Olympus to Hades, 531c²⁹) in what might be called its world-picturing scope. But the supposition also makes poetry itself extremely problematic: either the poet would need to be a polymathic expert (a current idea explicitly mocked by Socrates in the *Republic*³⁰) or his work will be purely parasitic on all the existing domains of knowledge, its significance fragmenting into ersatz bits of other activities and lacking any coherent identity of its own.

However, Socrates also exploits Ion's confession that he is interested only in Homer, not in other poets, to infer that he cannot be in possession of expertise and knowledge at all: 'for if it were through expertise (*technê*) that you could speak about Homer, you would also be able to speak about all the other poets as well—for there is surely an art of poetry as a whole (ποιητική γάρ που ἐστὶν τὸ ὅλον)'.³¹ But the premise behind this inference, underlined by analogy soon afterwards with expertise about practices such as 'the art of painting as a whole' (γραφική . . . τέχνη τὸ ὅλον), sculpture, instrumental music (532e–533c), and, in an ironic twist, *rhapsôdia* itself (533b7),³² clashes with the previous conception of poetry (and therefore its interpretation) as beholden for its subject matter to separate bodies of knowledge and expertise. Socrates himself seems to slip, without explanation, between different models of poetry as

²⁹ Cf. the similar characterization of mimetic art's ('mirroring') scope at *Resp.* 10.596c; note my comment on the latter, 181–2 below. The same idea of poetry's range appears in *POxy.* III 414, col. II: text in Lanata 1963: 216, Giuliano 1998: 162–3; cf. Ch. 3 n. 53, Ch. 6, 313–14.

³⁰ *Resp.* 10.598c–e; cf. Xen. *Symp.* 4.6 and Ch. 6 n. 119.

³¹ 532c. ποιητική here strictly denotes ποιητική τέχνη; cf. painting as γραφική . . . τέχνη, 532e. This implication of the -ικός suffix is not always present: see ποιητικοί for poets at *Meno* 99c–d, precisely where Socrates is judging them inspired rather than knowledgeable; cf. Rijksbaron 2007: 9, though he offers tired dogmatism on the larger issues. For 'as a whole', used to define the scope of a *technê*, cf. esp. *Phdr.* 261a (rhetoric).

³² The reference to *rhapsôdia* itself sets up two interpretative loops. (i) If there is such a thing as good *rhapsôdia*, it must include (530c) a rational understanding of the poetry which the rhapsode performs. But Socrates goes on to conclude that Ion does not have such an ability and yet is inspired to speak well about Homer: either, then, the premise at 530c was unjustified, or Socrates cannot really accept, despite (ironic?) appearances, that Ion is himself a good rhapsode. Strictly speaking, Socrates never claims there is no such thing as a good rhapsode with rational understanding of poetry, only that Ion himself does not fit this description. (ii) 533b–c purports to make *rhapsôdia* (like painting, music, etc.) a subject which can itself be expertly expounded: the expert in question would, by extrapolation from 535a, be an interpreter of an interpreter of an interpreter.

either a kind of secondary vehicle for other forms of expertise, or an art and expertise in its own right. He seems confident that there *is* such a thing as 'the art of poetry as a whole', yet he does nothing to identify its contents or to make it the basis for a demarcation of the rhapsode's interpretation of poetry. On the contrary, he ignores his own suggestion of a poetic art or expertise and in the middle section of the work advances the radical alternative that the activities of both poet and rhapsode are products not of knowledge at all but of divine inspiration.

The path taken by the conversation in the first part of *Ion* means, then, that the hypothesis of inspiration subsequently adopted by Socrates (and ostensibly prompted by Ion's autobiographical confession that Homer is the only poet who interests and stimulates him) is not justified by any close appraisal of the model of poetry as a *technê* in its own right, since this model is glimpsed only to be left aside. Far from solving a clearly analysed problem, the hypothesis of inspiration—a hypothesis, *au fond*, of the unexaminable and therefore unaccountable origins of poetic power—compounds the uncertainties about poetry's interpretation thrown up by Socrates' questioning of Ion. That is a reason for treating the middle section of the dialogue as something other than the statement of a committed, stable theory, let alone 'Plato's theory' of poetic inspiration. It is not a reason, however, for jumping to the opposite extreme of treating Socrates' proposal as entirely gratuitous or totally ironic, even if its conspicuously lyrical flights make it in its own way as much a prose-poem as an 'argument'.

In one respect, the hypothesis of inspiration leaves unanswered some of the same questions as *Apology* 22a–c. Just as the latter refers to 'many beautiful things' in poetry without telling us what they are or how Socrates apprehends them, so *Ion* 533d–4e tells us nothing about the *contents* of the 'many beautiful things' (πολλά . . . καὶ καλά, 534b) which it too attributes to Muse-inspired poetry. Even so, the *Ion* does give us a major clue which is missing from the *Apology* passage. Although the inspiration hypothesis might be thought of as primarily causal or aetiological (where does good poetry 'come from?'), Socrates develops it in *Ion* in a manner whose emphasis falls more heavily on the psychological states experienced by poets and conveyed to performers and audiences: that is, on the transmission—along the quasi-magnetic chain—of emotionally charged rapture or 'enthusiasm' (ἐνθουσιάζειν) and heightened imaginative vision. What is involved at every stage is a form of ecstasy: a loss of normal mind or self, and the temporary but intensely vivid psychic occupation of another

world.³³ Tellingly, this is the one place in the dialogue where Socrates and Ion see essentially eye to eye. Ion confirms Socrates' hypothesis by contributing his own firsthand details of the physical symptoms (streaming tears, bristling hair, and pounding heart) which attest to his imaginative and emotional involvement in the events of Homer's poetry (535c). Even after we have made allowance for ironic undermining of Ion's place in the chain (he believes in his own emotions but admits his ultimate concern with making money: surely *that* is not the inspiration of a Muse?),³⁴ the passage retains its coherence as a description of the core character of psychological transformation communicated from poet to performer to audience.

But where does this leave the inspiration hypothesis in relation to the dialogue as a whole? Problems come into view whether we look back from the centrepiece to what preceded it, or forward to what follows. Socrates resorted to the idea of inspiration in the first place to explain how Ion could be, so he claims, an excellent discursive interpreter of Homer (someone who speaks excellently about the poetry, 530c etc.) without possessing, as Socrates suggests, any rationally accountable expertise. But it is precisely at the point at which Socrates extends his image of 'magnetic' inspiration to the rhapsode as discursive interpreter, not just as performer, that Ion dissents. Whereas he was ready to confirm his own rapt, emotionally charged state when performing, he casts wry doubt on the notion that he is similarly inspired when *talking* about Homer: he does not believe this himself and would be surprised if Socrates thought so either, were he to hear Ion in his discursive mode (536d).³⁵ Beyond the immediate

³³ See esp. the language of being 'out of one's mind' *vel sim.* at 534a–b, 535c: the last passage, pace Verdenius 1983: 45, Ledbetter 2003: 91–2, does not indicate a belief on Ion's part of being literally 'present' at the events imagined. For the vocabularies of ἐνθουσιάζειν and ἔνθεος (lit. denoting 'possession by a god'), and being 'out of one's mind', etc., see Pfister 1959: esp. 948–50, 955–7, Padel 1995: 126–8; on Aristotle's usage, cf. Ch. 5, 239–41.

³⁴ 535e. Even so, the passage is not as crudely ironic as some have thought; it hints at plausible paradoxes about the professional performer's mentality: cf. Janaway 1992: 18 n. 31, Murray 1996: 123, Lada-Richards 2002: 400, 412–13 for observations on this point.

³⁵ One obvious but important consideration in favour of Ion's position is that in performance his imaginative absorption is incompatible with outwardly acknowledging his audience, whereas in discursive interpretation he addresses the audience directly. In other words, inspiration, as interpreted by both Socrates and Ion, brings with it a psychological suspension of reference to the poet's, performer's, or audience's immediate 'real-world' situation.

note of (dramatic) irony here, which leaves a reader free to wonder about Ion's credentials as exegete or critic (Socrates once again declines to give him the opportunity to *show* what he is capable of, 536d), a gap now opens up between the two levels of poetic experience which correspond to the two sides of Ion's professional activities: that is, between poetry as intensely emotional absorption in an imaginatively evoked world, and as the object of discursive, critical understanding.

But this gap is exactly what instigates the third phase of the conversation. With remarkable abruptness, Socrates drops his inspiration hypothesis and returns to a line of questioning which depends on criteria of knowledge and expertise (on both sides of the poet–interpreter equation). The change of tack is highlighted by Socrates' suggestion that Ion surely cannot be a good interpreter of subjects in Homer about which he himself lacks knowledge (536e). This flouts the original point of the excursus on inspiration, which was precisely to explain how Ion could (putatively) 'speak well' about Homer on the basis of something *other* than knowledge. It looks, then, as though once Ion himself rejects inspiration as a valid explanation of his function as discursive interpreter, Socrates discards it too and starts the enquiry, as it were, all over again. That does not mean that inspiration *tout court*, or every feature of Socrates' account of it, is a failed hypothesis. But it does mean that both Ion and Socrates accept that it cannot bridge the gap between poetry as vehicle of ecstatic experience and as object of critical understanding.

That is in itself sufficient, however, to destabilize our sense of the status and/or the extent of Socrates' commitment to the version of inspiration he has presented. If that commitment were wholehearted, then interpretation itself would be part of the transmission of divinely imbued rapture—but in that case, Socrates' own initial assumption that interpretation involves rational understanding of the poet's 'thought', 'mind', or 'meaning' (*dianoia*, 530b–c)³⁶ would have to be abandoned, since the ecstasy he depicts involves explicitly a suspension of consciously controlled 'thought' (*nous*, 534b–d) or presence of mind. If, on the other hand, Socrates' commitment to his own thesis of inspiration is not wholehearted, we are left unsure where it begins and ends. The final part of the dialogue does not resolve this dilemma for us. Socrates starts his questioning afresh at 536d, as noted, without

³⁶ For the 'thought(s)' (*διάνοια(ι)*) of poets, see *Prt.* 341e, 347a, *Resp.* 8.568a, with e.g. *Ar. Wasps* 1044, *Peace* 750, *Frogs* 1059, *Isoc.* 9.11; cf. *Ch.* 6 n. 107.

any reference to inspiration. But he will reinvoké the idea at the very end of the work in formulating the ironically polarized choice ('do you want to be thought malicious or divine?') with which he confronts Ion (541e–542a). Whatever else this signifies, it cannot directly tell us what Socrates (or Plato) 'believes'. It can only serve to crystallize the puzzles which are placed before readers of the dialogue.

The third and final part of the *Ion*'s triptych retraces some of the issues of the first part, while adding new ones of its own. Socrates now reverts to using locutions of the kind 'Homer says/speaks' ("Ὁμηρος λέγει, etc.), which reminds us of the first stage of the argument (esp. 531a–532b) and contrasts with the middle section's notion of a god *speaking through* the poet ('the god himself is the one speaking', ὁ θεὸς αὐτὸς ἐστὶν ὁ λέγων, 534d).³⁷ It also leaves intact the fully human categories of activity and knowledge by which *technai* can be identified and described.³⁸ But in returning to a purely human scrutiny of Ion's putative expertise as interpreter, Socrates revives the problematic assumption that the ability to interpret any given passage of Homer calls for domain-specific knowledge of the subject matter treated in it: the example of charioteering at 537a–c precisely parallels the very first example of the discussion, *mantikê*, 'divination', at 531b.³⁹ This reactivates the tension I earlier diagnosed in the first section of the dialogue: between poetry regarded as a sort of secondary reflection of, and therefore cognitively parasitic on, other *technai* (which would reduce poetry, at best, to a medium for truths which could be accessed independently of it), and poetry regarded as a distinct art in its own right ('the art of poetry as a whole').

We can pinpoint a symptom of this tension when Socrates tells Ion (and later reiterates the point with blatant sarcasm, 539e: 'have you

³⁷ In Socrates' account of inspiration, the idea of the poet himself 'speaking' continues to occur, but either (i) as a general formula for poetic composition and explicitly subordinate to possession by the divine (533e, 534d), or (ii) with reference to statements in poetry on the subject of inspiration itself (534a–b, d).

³⁸ When at 537c Socrates speaks of functions assigned to individual *technai* 'by the god', this implies a generalized dependence of human culture on divine instruction/assistance and is distinct from the earlier model of inspiration: unlike the latter, it posits a putative *origin* for knowledge, not an alternative to it.

³⁹ Cf. the recurrence of *mantikê* at 538e–539d. Of all Socrates' examples, this one has a twin aspect (hinted at but not pursued) which could have made it an apt comparandum: *mantikê* is subdivisible into a 'visionary' mode (cf. Theoclymenus at Hom. *Od.* 20.351–6, quoted at *Ion* 539a) and a more rationalistic-exegetical mode, somewhat like the performative/discursive split in Ion's own activities (n. 26 above).

got such a bad memory?') that he cannot claim to interpret well *everything* in Homer (536e). This entails the conception of poetry as a mere reflector of other *technai* too numerous for any individual to understand expertly. But it contradicts Socrates' earlier argument that if Ion had a knowledge-based expertise in interpreting poetry, it would have to be an expertise in *all* poetry, and therefore, a fortiori, in the whole of Homer (532c). This latter argument treats poetry not as a reflector of other domains of knowledge but as an art in its own right, 'the art of poetry as a whole'. The first section of the dialogue left these conflicting conceptions of poetry in unreconciled, indeed unacknowledged, conflict. The middle section swept both conceptions aside with its vision of ecstatic inspiration. The third section brings both of them back into view—but for what purpose?

If we try to focus that question through Ion himself, many commentators have noticed that Socrates (or Plato) seems to stack the odds against him. On the one hand, Socrates' persistence prods Ion into finally accepting the 'reflector of other *technai*' model, enticing him into grounding his own claims of interpretative expertise on one specific domain of knowledge, military strategy, with the ludicrous result that the rhapsode turns out 'really' to be a general—a textbook illustration of the logic of one kind of *reductio ad absurdum*. On the other hand, at the point where Ion makes his one move in the direction of recognizing poetry as a *technê* in its own right, and therefore recognizing his own interpretative role as not tied to domain-specific subjects within Homeric poetry, Socrates brushes the move aside. This juncture is at 540a–b, where Ion momentarily resists Socrates' attempt to atomize the contents of Homeric poetry into passages on charioteering, medicine, fishing, divination, etc., by suggesting that there is a type of subject matter that cuts across all these others: a matter of 'what it is appropriate for a man to say and what for a woman, what for a slave and what for a free person, what for a subject and what for a ruler'. This response, which adumbrates a principle of characterization paralleled in Aristotle's *Poetics*, might reasonably be taken to imply criteria of appropriateness that depend in part on the internal features and organization of a poem: criteria of consistency, coherence, plausibility.⁴⁰ But Ion's intuition is

⁴⁰ The Aristotelian parallel is *Poet.* 15.1454a19–36. I do not understand why Richardson 1975: 80 calls Ion's claim at 540b 'sophistic'; the suggested connection with Antisthenes is specious (conflating the differentiated speech of character types with adaptation

immediately wrenched back round by Socrates to the idea that individual speech acts in Homer will be best interpreted by someone with the domain-expertise, e.g. in navigation, medicine or animal-herding, most relevant to a given context.

This puts Socrates back on his previous track of questioning, and Ion, resisting no further, quickly plumps for military strategy as the specific expertise which he himself brings to bear on poetry. But by this stage, having followed the contours of the work's tripartite structure as well as various dialectical twists and turns within each of the sections, we should be only too well aware that Socrates' probings carry no transparent adherence to a fixed, single position. On the contrary, they have opened up complex possibilities which extend beyond Ion's capacity to cope with them. The key question which remains at the end, then, is not the purely dramatic one of how Ion himself should choose, as Socrates puts it, between being thought malicious or unjust (for 'concealing' his true expertise from Socrates) and being thought 'divine' (as part of a chain of inspiration, a hypothesis which, qua interpreter, Ion had explicitly rejected), but how the reader is to do better than Ion in trying to make sense of the various demands placed on poetry in the course of the dialogue.

One such attempt might take, in outline, the following form. Socrates adopts incompatible premises at different stages of the discussion. Most fundamentally, his apparent advocacy of a conception of poetry (and therefore of its interpretation too) as dependent on the various bodies of knowledge and expertise which exist independently of it clashes with his conviction that there exists such a thing as 'an art of poetry as a whole'. Equally conspicuously, that conviction (or, indeed, the assumption that poetry and its interpretation might involve *technê* of any kind) is incompatible with the grand hypothesis of divine inspiration expressed in the central section of the work. The dialogue is not a jigsaw puzzle; we cannot arrive at a solution which is demonstrably 'the right one', the only one which will make all the pieces fit together. But we can weigh possibilities against what seem to be the priorities informing Socrates' line of interrogation. One of

of speech to different *audiences*). Nor is Ion drawing a distinction between 'form' and 'content', pace Leszl 2006a: 331–2. Note the later discussion of a principle similar to Ion's at Phld. *Poem.* 5.34.35–35.32 Mangoni: I take 35.23–32 to combine a denial that poets can be masters of domain-specific expertise (cf. *ibid.* 38.22–32) with an affirmation that mimesis (here equivalent to imaginative fiction) can be judged in terms of 'internal' appropriateness (*πρῶτον*); cf. Asmis 1992b: 410–12.

those priorities is signalled near the outset by Socrates' description of Homer as 'the best and most divine of poets' (530b): at a minimal construal, this acknowledges something of very great power and value in Homeric poetry. But that already gives us a reason to see beyond Socrates' dialectical premise that poetry can be thought of as parasitic on, and a secondary vehicle for, other *technai* and bodies of knowledge. Far from helping us to recognize the great value of Homeric or any other poetry, this premise, if taken completely seriously, would simply dissolve the value of poetry: why would we turn to Homer to learn about medicine or charioteering, when we can turn to doctors and charioteers? But two other reasons for seeing this premise of Socrates' as only dialectical, and no answer in itself to the questions at stake in the dialogue, are, first, that it cannot come to terms with the picture of imaginative and emotional intensity which Socrates and Ion agree that the experience of poetry brings with it; and, secondly, that in the end it would make the *interpretation* of poetry a pseudo-question, since, as Socrates himself repeatedly stresses (in applying the premise itself), it would simply require us to identify in each case the independent expert with the knowledge most relevant to each passage, utterance, or event in a poem.

The dialogue gives us cumulative reasons, then, to prefer the conviction (albeit unsubstantiated) of 'an art of poetry as a whole' to the ultimately futile attempt to make poetry a mere reflection or echo of domain-specific knowledge that is already and separately codified in discrete forms of practice and expertise. But this still leaves us with the *Ion*'s largest conflict, i.e. between the idea of poetry (and, correspondingly, of its interpretation) as either a knowledge-based 'art' or, by sharp contrast, a product of divinely initiated ecstasy. I have already suggested that the dialogue itself is carefully designed to withhold a neat solution to that split: the satirical choice which Socrates offers Ion at the end encodes, for alert readers, an unanswered question. If we ponder why that should be so, one possible inference is that Plato regards the question as *having* no good answer. And if we consider, in turn, why that should be so, the clues provided by the dialogue itself point to an unavoidable friction between an impulse to subject poetry to the terms of discursive rationality and, on the other side, a recognition of poetry's power as involving a core of imaginative-cum-emotional rapture which defies transparent explanation. In the end, the *Ion* may give us reason precisely *not* to choose—in any definitive, all-or-nothing way—between Socrates'

inclination to believe in 'an art of poetry as a whole' and his attraction to the hypothesis of a psychologically transformative power which ties together poets, performers, and audiences but resists rational analysis. Yet by its oppositional dialectic the work also seems to frustrate any hope of merging those two perspectives into a unified poetics.

Contrary to received opinion, it is not the case that poetry is always denied the ranking of *technê* in Plato. There are passages in several dialogues which admit at least an element of *technê* to poetry, in keeping with what was already an established way of thinking before Plato's time and was to be a fundamental starting-point for Plato's student Aristotle in the *Poetics*.⁴¹ As I have tried to show, *Ion* itself, taken in its entirety, is ambiguous (or contradictory) on this point. Socrates' rationalistic drive expresses a need to demarcate an 'art of poetry as a whole' (bringing with it a correlative expertise of poetic interpretation). Such a demarcation would give poetry a solid, self-subsisting identity, grounded, like all *technai*, in a teleologically structured understanding of materials and processes, and capable of being judged according to publicly available (if partly disputable) standards. The *Ion* is clearly not meant to exclude altogether the possibility of locating certain elements of *technê* within the practice of poetry, the most obvious candidates being matters of formal control and organization at various levels from metrical composition to the design of whole works.⁴² But while omitting to spell out such elements it draws attention to two major doubts about how the need to identify an art of poetry could ever be completely satisfied. The first, ironically (given Socrates' strategy of persistently identifying reflections of independent *technai* such as medicine and charioteering in Homer), is signalled most prominently at 531c–d, where the

⁴¹ See e.g. *Phdr.* 245a (where Socrates *does* implicitly accept the point, pace Rijksbaron 2007: 10) and *Leg.* 4.719c, both allowing *technê* to be combined with some kind of inspiration (cf. n. 25 above); *Phdr.* 268c–269a (with n. 42 below); the term *antitechnos* ('rival in artistry') at *Phdo* 60d (cf. *Ar. Frogs* 816); the implications of *Ap.* 22c–d (with n. 18 above); Socrates' famous paradox about the composition of tragedy and comedy at *Symp.* 223d (cf. Agathon, *Symp.* 196d, with n. 25 above); the classification of mimesis in general as *technê* at *Resp.* 10.601d; and perhaps the mimetic poet's *sophia* at *Resp.* 3.398a (here equivalent to *technê*? but contextually coloured by a natural, quasi-inspirational gift for psychic transformation). For pre-Platonic usage, cf. Ch. 3, 110–11, with n. 30 there.

⁴² Cf. the emphasis on formal design at *Phdr.* 268d, where tragedy is treated as a *technê* (cf. the implications of 268a2, c4) on the same footing as medicine or music.

interlocutors agree that poets 'talk about' all aspects of both human and divine existence, including things that happen in the heavens and in Hades. But every *technê*, by definition, has its own domain: how could there be a *technê* of discourse about everything in the cosmos? (The question applies just as much, of course, to philosophy as to poetry—a point not lost on Plato.) The other reason, foregrounded by Socrates' lyrical exposition of the inspiration hypothesis, is the difficulty of seeing how there could be a codified technique, a set of knowledge-based procedures, for successfully producing the intense charge of imaginative absorption and emotional responsiveness which Socrates and Ion agree is a hallmark of poetic experience. How, in short, could there be a *technê* of poetic ecstasy?

The perplexities of the *Ion* are hard if not impossible to resolve. The characterization of Ion himself as naively complacent can lure readers into unsustainably black-and-white judgements on the point of the work.⁴³ The main challenge is how to see beyond the *ad hominem* level of the encounter—the level at which Ion's credentials as critical interpreter of Homer are certainly thrown into question—to the enduringly serious issues that emerge from Socrates' seeming fluctuation between contrasting ideas of poetry. My own approach has attempted to suggest that the dialogue uses a strikingly polarized framework of ideas to reach an aporetic conclusion. Rather than treating the central section, where Socrates expounds a view of inspiration, as a secure solution to the issues raised by the work, we should regard it as part of the problem of the work as a whole. And that problem—for Plato as well as for his readers—is nothing less than how to find a way to grasp and explain the value of 'the best and most divine' poetry.

THE PHILOSOPHICAL (EX-)LOVER OF POETRY

Far from amounting to the monolithic, unwaveringly hostile doctrine which so many modern scholars have constructed from them, Plato's

⁴³ A token example is the untenable view of Valakas (2002: 88) that 'Socrates treats Ion as a charlatan unable to explain his divine art [*sic*]: if we accept Socrates' account of divine inspiration, Ion *should not* be able to 'explain' it and is no charlatan; but if he is a charlatan, he cannot have a divine gift.

many dealings with poetry constitute complex transactions of philosophically unfinished business. While the dialogues often expose poetry (and its advocates) to probing challenges, they never try to push poetry permanently aside or to claim that philosophy (in the form of Plato's own writing) can ever afford to stop engaging with it. I shall argue that this is even, and most significantly, true of what modern scholarly orthodoxy takes to be the ultimate, definitive statement of Platonic renunciation of poetry: the banishment of the 'best' poets (above all, Homer and the tragedians) from the ideal city of the *Republic*.⁴⁴ By focusing in particular on the remarkable yet relatively neglected epilogue (607b–608b) to the *Republic*'s second critique of poetry, I want to trace a deep ambiguity in the treatment of the banishment motif itself. Standard readings of the *Republic* emphasize that in book 10 Socrates not only returns to, but reiterates and revalidates, the verdict of exile passed in book 3 on mimetically versatile poets who give powerfully dramatic expression to the forces of psychic multiplicity and disunity. But this apparent reaffirmation of the verdict of exile is dramatically undercut, I shall maintain, by Socratic gestures of hesitation and ambivalence, in fact by indications of lingering if equivocal 'love' of poetry. To dwell on the supposed banishment without seeing the force of the continuing attachment to poetry is to miss a whole layer of Plato's own writing and thinking in this context.⁴⁵ Furthermore, to read the arguments of book 10 without taking full account of the *framing* of these arguments by Socrates' revealingly self-conscious remarks, both at the start of the book and in what I am calling the epilogue to the discussion of poetry, is to reduce Plato's text to a doctrinal rigidity which distorts the dialectical

⁴⁴ Justification for taking the motif of banishment to apply to (at least parts of) the 'best' poets includes the following: (i) Homer is at the centre of the arguments in books 2–3 and 10; (ii) Socrates' concerns are made more acute by the outstanding poetic qualities of the works/passages in question (3.387b); (iii) the 'greatest charge' against poetry in book 10 is that 'even the best of us' can fall under the emotional power of Homer and the tragedians (605c). Note also the passing reference to exclusion of tragedians in particular (on the bizarre grounds that they praise tyranny) at *Resp.* 8.568b.

⁴⁵ Gould (2001: 310–14) is an egregious example of such a one-sided reading: without any hint of the apologetic-cum-erotic epilogue at 607–8, he suggests that Plato returns to the 'attack' on art in *Resp.* 10 as though 'worried that the corpse will not lie down' (314). Further criticism of reductive verdicts on Plato's 'hostility' to poetry in Giuliano 2005: 340, Halliwell 2002a: 55. The present section is a revised version of the argument of Halliwell 2011c.

and psychological nuances of its main character.⁴⁶ The relationship between the 'frame' and the details of argumentation in the first half of *Republic* 10 is, as I hope to show, intricate and subtle.

I have suggested elsewhere that book 10's critique of mimesis is more provisional, rhetorically edged, and philosophically provocative than most scholars are willing to admit.⁴⁷ Anyone who thinks that this critique sets out a doctrinally fixed position needs to explain a series of anomalies. One is that at 596b even the lowly carpenter is given cognitive access to apparently metaphysical 'forms', whereas earlier in the work such forms were intelligible only to advanced philosophers. If, on the other hand, the form to which the carpenter 'looks' in his mind is nothing more than a blueprint of (e.g.) a couch, the argument that the painter of a couch makes something different in kind is self-evidently true but hardly damaging to the status of painting; nor does it rule out the possibility that the painter too might have a 'form' in his mind, a possibility recognized elsewhere in Plato's work.⁴⁸ A second anomaly is that the mirror analogy at 596d–e is partly incongruous with its immediate context, since one cannot turn

⁴⁶ The paraphrase of *Resp.* 10 in Griswold 2003: §§ 3.3–3.4 ignores the ambivalence of Socrates' epilogue; Untersteiner 1966: 143–7 (with summary on 286) largely suppresses this; Pradeau 2009: 280–1, Bychkov and Sheppard 2010: xviii are examples of scholars who do not even mention the passage where reference to it is called for. Worse still, Leszl (2006b: 297) blithely doubts whether the passage can be taken 'very seriously'. A sensitive awareness of book 10's equivocation is shown by Vicaire 1960, 263–5, though on 401 he mistakenly transfers the incantations from Socrates to poetry itself. Briefer mentions in Greene 1918: 3, Collingwood 1938: 49 ('Socrates seems half to relent'; but his account of the larger context is over-zealous), Gomme 1954: 61–2, Daiches 1956: 22, Grube 1965: 54, Asmis 1992a: 338 (but cf. n. 77 below), Janaway 2006: 396, Murdoch 1993: 13 ('mitigating gesture'; but ignored in her larger account), Osborne 1987: 57 ('Socrates the lover of poetry'), Erler 2007: 486. Levin (2001: 143–67) takes seriously the need to reconsider the possible value of poetry, though her response is more narrowly gauged than mine.

⁴⁷ Halliwell 2002a: 55–62, 133–43; the related French version in Halliwell (2005b) emphasizes book 10's pointers to the need for radical rethinking of the issues. I now note that Greene (1918: 56) finds an element of 'satire' in book 10; his approach (50–6), differently slanted from mine, rightly refuses to take the arguments as Plato's last word. Cf. Shorey 1930–5: II. lxii, 'Plato's half-serious formulation'. Osborne (1987) interestingly reads the arguments as promptings to a better 'theory of art', though along lines somewhat different from mine.

⁴⁸ At *Grg.* 503d–504a the painter is a craftsman who imposes form (here *eidos*) and beauty on his materials; since he has the same sort of mental conception of his task (see (ἀπο)βλέπειν πρὸς, 503e, as at *Resp.* 10.596b) as other craftsmen, it is hardly extravagant to infer that he has a form of some kind in his mind. Cf. the poet and musician's concern with unified structure at *Phdr.* 268d–269a, n. 42 above. On the problematic metaphysics of forms at *Resp.* 10.596–7, see Opsomer (2006).

a mirror on the gods or on Hades, as the strict logic of 596e (referring back to 596c) ought to require: there is an inbuilt tension here between visible and invisible, between naturalistic resemblance and creative imagination. (One might also note, for good measure, that earlier in the *Republic* mirror images and artistic images were both said to require the *same* understanding on the part of their viewers as the things and qualities whose forms they reflect.⁴⁹) In addition, Socrates' seeming disparagement of painting, qua paradigm of mimetic art in general, as inescapably parasitic on the empirical world of phenomena, cannot be the whole story of his (or Plato's) position. It clashes with assumptions made about painting in several earlier passages in the *Republic*, not least with the acknowledgement of painting (among much else) as an ethically expressive artform at 3.401a, as well as with the recognition of pictorial idealism at 5.472d and 6.500e–501c.⁵⁰

At a further level of Plato's writing, doctrinal readings of *Republic* 10 need to tell us why the ostensible rebuttal of the case for Homer's wisdom involves recourse to *ad hominem* biographical rhetoric (if Homer knew so much, he should have served as a lawgiver, his friends should have become his 'followers', etc., 599b ff.⁵¹); or why, more generally, Socrates' voice adopts a patently satirical tone at regular intervals, even suggesting, for instance, that works like those of Homer are 'easy to make' (599a). Such considerations, none of which has been satisfactorily dealt with in doctrinal readings of book 10, are best read as intimating that the arguments in this section of the dialogue are not definitive statements of an irreversible condemnation, but incitements to recognize the need for a new and better

⁴⁹ *Resp.* 3.402b–c.

⁵⁰ It does not remove the problem to say, with Murdoch 1993: 11, that reference to pictorial idealism in the middle books is not 'intended as a kind word to painters'. The explicit recognition that painting is not limited to mirror-like reflection of particulars suffices to show that book 10's argument is incomplete and/or satirically reductive, pace Herrmann 2007: 295 n. 143 (who incorrectly states that *Resp.* 400d–401a 'says how things should be but are not'). The most elaborate attempt to reconcile book 10 with the work's earlier references to idealistic painting is that of Schmitt (2001), taking a larger perspective on Platonic psychology. Hub (2009) offers as revisionist what is little more than a return to an unnuanced doctrinalism in the reading of *Resp.* 10.

⁵¹ Some unsympathetic ancient readers turned this *ad hominem* argument back against Plato himself: see *Athen.* xi 508a–b for the scoffing claim that the *Republic* (and *Laws*) failed to influence any actual Greek cities (compare the reference to Lycurgus and Solon with *Resp.* 10.599d–e).

justification of artistic mimesis. I hope to show, moreover, that the epilogue to the discussion of poetry at 607b–608b lends explicit and expressive support to such an interpretation, confronting readers in the process with a powerful paradox about the status of the whole of the preceding critique of mimesis.

At the heart of my case is the contention that *Republic* 10 offers no simple repudiation of the best poets but a kind of counterpoint in which resistance *and* attraction to their work are intertwined: a counterpoint which lays bare the problem of whether, and in what sense, it might still be possible to be a philosophical lover of poetry. The arguments about poetry advanced here by Socrates do not purport to provide an outright solution to that problem. In a remarkably pointed way, Plato's own writing in this part of the *Republic* tells us that it does not contain complete or final answers to the questions it raises about poetry and the soul. Indeed, the whole thrust of the epilogue to these arguments, as we shall see, is to set up a perspective which looks beyond the Platonic text itself into the lives of those reading it, whether in the Academy or elsewhere: in that regard, we can sense Plato situating his work in relation to a hinterland of active debate about the nature of poetry (a debate to which, among others, Aristotle, Antisthenes, Alcidas, and Isocrates were contributors).⁵² The rhetorical and satirical features noted above can accordingly be read as a marked communicative strategy on Plato's part. They give provocative bite to the challenge which his work sets for his contemporary readers, most of whom could be assumed to be inveterate 'lovers of poetry'. And Plato adds delicacy, even a touch of pathos, to the challenge by putting it in the mouth of a Socrates who confesses his own love of poetry.

⁵² Büttner (2000: 208) plausibly takes *Resp.* 607b–608b to reflect ongoing debate about poetry inside the Academy; cf. Vegetti 2007a: 217, 230 ~ Vegetti 2007b: 18, 31 (but with too radical a thesis about book 10's separate composition). Pohlenz (1965: 447–9, cf. 463) thinks the opponents are 5th-cent. sophists like Gorgias; despite echoes of Gorgias elsewhere in book 10 (Ch. 6 n. 3; cf. n. 99 below), this misses the contemporary resonance of Plato's text. Else (1972) argues that book 10 is in part a reaction to (an early version of) Aristotle's *Poetics*: cf. Halliwell 1988: 195. Outside the Academy, there are various figures to whom Plato might have been responding; for Alcidas, see Richardson 1981: esp. 8–9, with Alcidi. *Soph.* 1 for a generalized swipe at those who neglect (poetic?) *paideia*; for Antisthenes, see Richardson 1975: 77–81, cf. Kahn 1996: 4–9, 121–4. Late in his career, in 339, Isocrates (12.19) was publicly criticized for allegedly devaluing poetry in his system of teaching: see Ch. 6, 285–7.

When Socrates (re)turns unexpectedly to the subject of poetry at the start of book 10, claiming that the conclusions previously reached in book 3 have been corroborated by the division of the soul undertaken in the intervening stretch of the dialogue (595a), he puts it to Glaucon that ‘mimetic’ poetry (including both tragedy and Homeric epic: 595b–c) can cause damage or impairment to the minds of its audiences unless they possess the ‘drug’ or ‘antidote’ (*pharmakon*) of knowing precisely what such poetry amounts to (595b).⁵³ Revealingly, Glaucon, who was not Socrates’ interlocutor for most of the earlier discussion of poetry but did occupy this role during the later division of the soul into its three parts, does not immediately grasp what Socrates means—either, we might suppose, by the ‘damage’ poetry can do to the soul, or by the ‘antidote’ against it. Socrates reacts to Glaucon’s uncertainty by announcing somewhat nervously (see below) that he will speak his mind on the subject (595b); he then embarks on a fresh critique of mimesis ‘as a whole’, employing painting as an artistic comparandum to mimetic poetry.⁵⁴ It looks at first sight, therefore, as though the ‘drug’ or ‘antidote’ of knowledge needed to combat the psychological harm of mimetic poetry will be contained in the arguments of book 10 itself. But there are grounds, I believe, to decline this superficially tempting inference.

Those grounds relate to the fact that in the epilogue to this phase of the discussion Socrates will later propose that until poetry, now personified as a beautiful woman, or her lovers (‘lovers of poetry’, *φιλοποιηταί*, a surprisingly rare word⁵⁵) can produce an ethical

⁵³ In medical terms, the present metaphor implies a drug which *prevents* a disease (cf. *Resp.* 2.382c ~ 3.389b) rather than one which cures a disease already contracted (as e.g. 3.406d, 408a): i.e., those who possess the knowledge will never succumb to poetry’s harmful effects.

⁵⁴ I leave aside here the controversy over how the sense of *mimesis* in book 10 relates to that (or, rather, *those*) in book 3: cf. Halliwell 2002a: 56. Moss (2007: 437 n. 36) strangely claims that the term was used ‘more broadly’ in book 3: this contradicts Socrates’ intention at 595c (cf. 603a) to discuss mimesis ‘as a whole’ (*ὅλως*), a detail Moss ignores. Burnyeat (1999: 290–2) takes 10.595a to denote ‘intrinsically mimetic genres’ (cf. 322), but he blurs the fact that Homer counts as unqualifiedly mimetic in book 10 but was *not* so at 3.394c. Richardson Lear (2011) offers a fresh analysis. Whatever the case at the start of *Resp.* 10, by 603b–c (where all *ποίησις* is apparently a form of *μιμητική*) it is hard to see any difference between mimetic poetry and poetry *tout court*; note 599c1 (‘any other of the poets’), 600e–1a, for the argument’s ‘drift’ in that direction. Cf. Leszl 2006b: 290. See also *Tim.* 19d.

⁵⁵ If *φιλοποιηταίς* is the correct reading at *Phld. Mus.* 4.140.27 Delattre, that must refer to *Resp.* 607d itself: but the inaccuracy of Philodemus’ paraphrase is

vindication of her value to souls and societies, the likes of himself and Glaucon will ‘listen to her’ (a telling detail to which I shall return) ‘while singing as a self-protecting incantation the argument we are now formulating’.⁵⁶ There are three reasons for refusing to identify the ‘antidote’ of knowledge posited at 595b with the ‘incantation’ of 608a and, consequently, with the contents of book 10 itself.⁵⁷ In the first place, the terms in which the end of the second critique of poetry is couched will stress that the argument is not finished and may not be secure: poetry or her adherents may yet come up with the requested defence, thus making the argument itself subject to revision and incompatible with the status of ‘knowledge’. Secondly, the language of ‘incantations’ used by Socrates at 608b is hard if not impossible to reconcile with the conditions of philosophical knowledge, since, as we shall see, the concept of a (metaphorical) incantation (*epôdê*) denotes at least a partly non-epistemic agency.⁵⁸ Finally, since the knowledge specified at 595b conveys immunity to harm, those who possessed it would have no need for self-protective incantations or spells—any more, one might add, than they would need to give poetry a further chance to justify itself, as Socrates is prepared to do.

Rather than taking the knowledge referred to at 595b to be contained in book 10 itself, it makes better sense to treat it as the special property of true (that is, ideal) philosophers, the philosophers whose paradigm was constructed in books 5–6 and who are defined above all, in their fully achieved state, by transcendent knowledge of the good. Those who possess such knowledge are taken by Socrates to be very few. In fact, he alludes to their extreme rarity further on in book 10 itself, at the start of the passage in which he brings what he

compounded by the false claim of Delattre (2007*a*: ii. 441) that Plato’s text ‘condemns’ lovers of poetry.

⁵⁶ ἀκροασόμεθ’ αὐτῆς ἐπάδοντες ἡμῖν αὐτοῖς τοῦτον τὸν λόγον ὃν λέγομεν (608a). For the textual problem of the first word of the following sentence (608a6), see the app. crit. in Slings 2003: 389, with Adam 1963: 419–20: my own inclination favours either Madvig’s ἀσόμεθα or Adam’s ἀκροασόμεθα.

⁵⁷ ‘Antidote’ and ‘incantation’ are standardly identified: e.g. Belfiore 1983: 62, Murray 1996: 233, Burnyeat 1999: 288, Giuliano 2005: 131, Gastaldi 2007: 146; cf. Ferrari 1989: 142 (‘related’), Leszl 2004: 179 (‘recalls’). Halliwell 1988: 107 (*ad* 595b) blurs the difference in a way which (as with some other things too) I no longer think right.

⁵⁸ The language of knowledge plays no part in the incantation itself: note νομίζειν at 608b, and cf. εἰκότως (607b), δοκοῦν (607c), both falling short of certainty.

calls the 'greatest charge' or 'greatest accusation' against poetry. That charge is precisely that (mimetic) poetry is capable of doing severe damage (with a verbal echo of the start of the book) 'even to good people, with the exception of very few'.⁵⁹ But the 'greatest charge' argument allows us to notice something else of fundamental importance for the shape of book 10's critique of poetry. As he proceeds to explain the kind of experience in which even good people 'surrender' to the power of poetry, Socrates speaks in the first-person plural of 'the best of us' (οἱ βέλτιστοι ἡμῶν, 605c). It is much more than a grammatical technicality to observe that first-person plural pronouns and verbs stamp the point of view both of the 'greatest charge' argument and of the subsequent epilogue.⁶⁰ In other words, Socrates—by which, as throughout, I mean strictly the persona presented in the text—does not purport to be one of 'the very few' (that tiny minority even among 'the good') who are immune to the potential harm of poetry.⁶¹

This is all the more striking given that he *does* associate or align himself and Glaucon with 'the good' (*epieikeis*) and even with 'the best' (*beltistoi*), which must here mean, collectively, those committed to following the promptings of philosophical reason.⁶² What this implies in terms of the overall direction of argument in the later parts of the critique is that it is possible to be fully committed to the pursuit of philosophical ideals and yet to remain deeply susceptible to the power of poetry. That just *is* what Socrates says, unironically, about the likes of himself and Glaucon. Socrates does not profess to have the 'antidote', equivalent to knowledge of poetry's real nature, which he posited near the start of book 10, any more than he ever

⁵⁹ ... καὶ τοὺς ἐπικεικίς ἱκανὴν εἶναι λωβᾶσθαι, ἔκτος πάντων ὀλίγων (605c).

⁶⁰ See 605d, 606a, 607b–608b *passim*. Furthermore, the second-person singulars addressed to Glaucon at 606c–d imply as much about Socrates' as about Glaucon's own experience.

⁶¹ One might wonder whether this minority would still listen to poetry: the answer (in the abstract) must be that they would have no reason to do so for their own part, though return to the Cave might in some circumstances require it. For an image of the Platonic Socrates attending the tragic theatre, see Pl. *Symp.* 194c, where the implications extend beyond the *proagon* (mentioned just before, 194b).

⁶² On either side of his reference to 'the best of us', 605c, Socrates uses *beltiston* to describe the best part of the soul (605b, 606a); he also applies the adj. directly to reason, *logos*, at 607a7. But at 607a1 the word describes admirers of Homer who are 'as good as they can be' (βελτίστους εἰς ὅσον δύνανται). 605c can readily denote those with strong philosophical aspirations who nonetheless (except for the 'very few') fall short of the ideal.

declares himself a true or perfect philosopher who has left the Cave.⁶³ What he does profess to have—and to *need*—is an ‘incantation’ or ‘spell’ against poetry. Plato must have expected attuned readers to have an interest in (and perhaps an understanding of) what that might mean.

To work towards a fuller comprehension of this complex trope, we must take account of the fact, already mentioned, that at the start of book 10 Socrates prefaces his further remarks on poetry with two indications of personal hesitation: one, a gently ironic gesture of nervousness about whether the present company might ‘denounce’ his views to the tragedians and other mimetic poets; the other, a confession (in which it is much harder to detect irony) of long-standing love (*philia*) and reverence (*aidôs*) for Homer in particular. (Socrates will later go further and speak of his feelings for poetry in terms of *erôs*, passionate desire: 607e; see below.) Why should Plato give Socrates these personally inflected notes of sensitivity and uncertainty, which go beyond the less conspicuous hints of ‘apology’ contained in the previous critique of poetry in books 2–3?⁶⁴ The answer I propose is that book 10 approaches poetry as a subject of directly personal concern for lovers of poetry who are reading the *Republic* itself, whereas books 2–3 were orientated much more towards the role that poetry should play in the education and formation of young souls in the ideal city.

The earlier critique, which was situated specifically within the project of founding an imaginary city (a city in words and a city of philosophical ‘myth’) as an analogy to the life of the individual soul, certainly provided indications that in thinking about the role of poetry in education Plato’s readers need to ponder the role of poetry in adult (and therefore their own) lives as well.⁶⁵ But it was nonetheless the

⁶³ It is only a partial counter-argument that at 606b Socrates ostensibly includes himself among the ‘few’ who recognize that emotions felt in the theatre have consequences for psychic life outside the theatre. If we wish to identify these few with those of 605c, as I did in Halliwell 1988: 148 (though I am no longer sure this is obligatory), then 605c–d shows that Socrates does not claim to be one of those who have fully *internalized* this awareness.

⁶⁴ Socrates struck a note of hesitation in relation to Homer at 3.391a; the tone of 398a is also germane but more uncertain: it was much cited and debated in antiquity (e.g. Dion. Hal. *Pomp.* 1.1, Dio Chrys. 53.5, Heraclitus, *Quaest. Hom.* 4). Cf. Socrates’ embarrassment in speaking derogatorily of the poets at *Ap.* 22b (with 159–66 above), though the immediate issue and effect are different.

⁶⁵ Cf. Burnyeat 1999: 256, 262, as well as the general emphasis of his lectures (an outstanding contribution) on Plato’s concern with ‘the total culture’.

educational scenario, with its formalized, quasi-institutional focus, which dictated the terms of that discussion. By contrast, *Republic* 10 makes no reference whatever to the educational system or the socio-political structure of Callipolis; instead, it broadens the earlier topic of education into the larger cultural question of whether Homer's poetry deserves to count as the supreme 'education' (*paideia*) of Greece.⁶⁶ Nothing is now said about young Guardians, or any Guardians at all—only the *internal* 'guardianship' or 'protection' (*φυλακή*) which the soul exercises or fails to exercise over itself (606a).⁶⁷ And after the opening sentences of book 10, the only reference back to the society and politics of the imaginary city which has shaped so much of the dialogue's quest occurs at the conclusion of the argument (607a–c), where, as we shall see, it becomes caught up in a remarkable statement of ambivalence on Socrates' part.

Where books 2–3, then, scrutinized and evaluated poetry principally in terms of education (including the politics of education), book 10 reopens the subject in a way which gradually allows that earlier perspective to fade into the background, though not, of course, to vanish altogether from the mind of a retentive reader of the work.⁶⁸ The relationship of book 10 to the earlier parts of the *Republic* raises many complex issues, including details of psychology and metaphysics which lie outside my brief here.⁶⁹ My immediate concern is with a shift in perspective between books 2–3 and book 10 that affects the position of at least one kind of reader of Plato's text. Whereas the earlier critique concentrated relatively impersonally on poetry's role

⁶⁶ See esp. 606e; cf. the idea that *paideia* itself is a subject on which Homer allegedly 'attempts to speak' (599c–d).

⁶⁷ For the idea of an internal 'guardian' in the soul, see esp. 9.591a (with the cognate verb at 591e). Cf. the myth of Er's (symbolic) motif of the *daimôn* which accompanies the soul through life as a 'guardian' (*phulax*) and 'fulfiller' of the life chosen by the soul in its preexistent state, 620d.

⁶⁸ There are, of course, direct back-references, e.g. 603e (to 387d–e, 388), and the two sections share a preoccupation with tragedy and Homer ('leader of the tragedians', 595c, cf. 598d, 605c, 607a).

⁶⁹ As regards psychology, Socrates starts by referring back (595a) to earlier analysis of the soul, yet he never directly adduces the tripartite model in what follows and sometimes seems to ignore it, e.g. in the blurring of *thumos* and *epithumia* at 606d; for differences between book 10 and earlier books in this respect, cf. Belfiore 1983: 50–6, Kamtekar 2008: 350 n. 31. On the metaphysical side, the situation is comparable: book 10 'echoes' the hierarchical ontology of the middle books but nowhere specifically adduces the earlier discussion and again sometimes seems to ignore it, e.g. in giving the craftsman understanding of 'forms' at 596b (n. 48 above).

in the education of young Guardians, Socrates' confessional stance of 'love and reverence' towards Homer—a love implanted in him precisely in his own childhood (595b)—serves as an invitation to readers to bring Socrates' arguments into relation with *their own* (presumed) love of poetry. This is not a historical speculation about the concrete readership of the *Republic*, but a way of tracing in Plato's text a set of cues for one kind of implied reader. This factor will recur with renewed emphasis in the epilogue to book 10's critique of poetry, making it even more plausible and important to suppose that Socrates, in speaking of his own love of poetry to Glaucon (whom he takes to share it), is tacitly addressing those who themselves understand, from the inside, what it is like to succumb to the power of poetry.

I would add here a consideration which is hardly ever taken into account in treatments of the first part of book 10 but which supplies a further set of cues for an implied reader of the work. If we come to the start of what we call book 10 from the end of what we call book 9 (and my point is about the sequence of text and thus independent of whether the book division itself is Platonic),⁷⁰ we have at the front of our minds the idea of the city of the *Republic* as above all the city (*polis*) or constitution (*politeia*) 'in the soul'. This motif is one of the salient features of the final pages of book 9; it is more prominent there than anywhere else in the entire dialogue. At 590e–591a Socrates asserted that the point of education is to establish a 'ruler', 'guardian', and 'constitution' *inside* the soul. It is by attending to 'the constitution in himself' (τὴν ἐν αὐτῷ πολιτείαν, 591e), he proceeds to say, that the good person will adopt the right attitude to externals such as wealth and honour. And he and Glaucon end the book by agreeing that such a person will engage in politics only 'in the city of himself' (ἐν γὰρ τῇ ἑαυτοῦ πόλει, 592a), 'the city in words' which has been constructed in the course of the dialogue—a city which may exist only as an ideal 'model' (*paradeigma*) but which is nonetheless a compelling standard by which the individual must 'found his own city' or 'make a new city of himself' (ἑαυτὸν κατοικίζειν, 592b).

This passage at the end of book 9 could be debated from various angles. I want, for present purposes, to bypass the immense and, in a

⁷⁰ Some book divisions (e.g. 2, 5) mark stronger points of transition than others (e.g. 9, part of an ongoing typological sequence). But the start of each book, from 2 onwards, certainly needs to be read against the background of what precedes.

sense, inexhaustible question of the relationship between the literal (political) and analogical (psychological) roles of Callipolis in the *Republic* as a whole. The sole point I want to highlight is that the unprecedented stress placed on the soul's internal city at the end of book 9 steers the reader towards considering the following discussion of poetry in similar terms. It is no accident that apart from 590d–592b the most explicit occurrences of this same trope are both in *Republic* 10 itself, at 605b (where the mimetic poet is said to introduce a 'bad constitution' into the individual soul) and, most significantly, at 608b, in the epilogue, where the protective incantation against poetry is to be sung by one who 'fears for the constitution inside himself'. It is not, of course, that book 10 forgets about the politics of poetry; 605b for example, just cited, explicitly juxtaposes city and soul in a way which chimes with the central design of the whole work.⁷¹ But it nonetheless holds good that, unlike the discussion in books 2–3, the second critique of poetry is independent of any particular social framework, let alone the peculiar class-structure or institutions of Callipolis, and correspondingly focuses on the impact of poetry on the individual soul. This reinforces my suggestion about Socrates' personal accent at 595b–c. Book 10, in short, sets up as its implicit addressee the individual lover of poetry: more specifically, the lover of poetry who cares whether the love of poetry can be reconciled with the values of philosophical idealism.

The points I have picked out at the start of book 10 acquire extra force when taken in conjunction with the more elaborate cues provided by the closing part of the argument's 'frame', i.e. the epilogue at 607b–608b. It is to the details of this remarkable passage that I now want to turn. The first striking feature of the epilogue is that it casts the preceding arguments, and the decision to revisit the subject of poetry, as a 'speech for the defence' (ἀπολογεῖσθαι)⁷² in relation to the banishment of mimetic poetry from the ideal city. Several sections of the *Republic* refer to themselves as 'defences' against possible criticism: an important indicator that Plato knew his works would be available to a mixed readership which could not be expected to be

⁷¹ Cf. also the references to the city at 595a and 607b: but the first is directly in the shadow of book 9's emphasis on 'the city within', the second is sandwiched between the confessional character of the 'greatest charge' and the highly personal accents of the epilogue, as discussed in my text below.

⁷² Implied by the verb ἀπολογεῖσθαι at 607b. For other Platonic uses of judicial imagery, see Louis 1945: 64–5 nn. 99–100.

uniformly receptive to the ideas explored in them.⁷³ In the present case, we can be quite specific about what is at issue. Socrates proceeds to imagine addressing poetry directly, in her personified status as an alluring female (a kind of imagery for which there were precedents in poetry itself, not least in Old Comedy),⁷⁴ with an attempt to avert any suspicion that he and Glaucon deserve to be convicted of ‘harshness and crude philistinism’ (*σκληρότητα . . . καὶ ἀγροικίαν*, 607b). Now, the terms used in this last phrase occurred much earlier, at 3.410d–411a, to describe those who have no dealings with the musico-poetic arts (*mousikê*), those who ‘keep lifelong company with gymnastics but never touch *mousikê*’.⁷⁵ At 607b, then, Socrates is keen to explain that he and Glaucon are *not* irremediably hostile or insensitive to poetry and the cultural values associated with it (a charge, incidentally, which some people may have made against the historical Socrates).⁷⁶ It is vital to see, as Gadamer is among the few to have done, that it is precisely in order to make this point that Socrates adduces the ‘ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry’.

In other words, the reference to the ‘quarrel’ (which I take to be a shorthand for an evolving history of tension between different strands in Greek culture, not some kind of imaginary Platonic invention) is

⁷³ See e.g. 4.419a ff. (Adeimantus requests a defence against possible criticisms: cf. 420b, d), 5.453c (Socrates prompts Glaucon to come up with a defence of their position); cf. 6.488a, 490a. Some of Plato’s writings were criticized outside the Academy even during his lifetime: cf. Crantor fr. 8 (Mette) for mockery of the supposedly Egyptian borrowing of the social structure of the *Republic*.

⁷⁴ Poetry is a female (deity) who has gone into (voluntary) hiding in Ar. fr. 466; comedy is a woman who gratifies few of her wooers at Ar. *Kn.* 517. Cf. music personified as an abused female (perhaps a courtesan) in Pherecrates fr. 155, Cratinus’ presentation of Comedy as his wife in *Putine*, and the sexual characterization of Euripides’ muse at Ar. *Frogs* 1306–8; on such figures see Hall (2000), Sommerstein (2005). Since some of the (unidentified) quotations at *Resp.* 607b–c are probably comic (Halliwell 1988: 155; cf. now Most 2011: 7–12), it suits the context nicely if Plato is (subliminally) adapting a comic trope in personifying poetry. For older ideas of poetic pleasure as erotic, cf. Ch. 2, 46–7, Ch. 3, 101–3.

⁷⁵ οἱ ἂν γυμναστικῇ μὲν διὰ βίου ὀμιλήσωσιν, μουσικῆς δὲ μὴ ἄφωνται, 410c. At 410d Socrates couples *σκληρότης*, ‘harshness’, with *ἀγριότης*, ‘fierceness’ or ‘hardness’ (over-development of the thumoeidic part of the soul). *ἀγριο-* terms are from the same root as *ἀγροικος*, used by Socrates in the same context (411a): note their synonymy at *Phdr.* 268d–e, with Halliwell 1988: 154, Worman 2008: 188–9 for further passages; cf. n. 84 below. See Ar. *Thesm.* 159–60 for a physical pun on such ideas, with Ch. 3 n. 23 for those without interest in *mousikê*.

⁷⁶ Ar. *Frogs* 1491–5 shows that Socrates could be at least satirically suspected of ‘abandoning *mousikê*’, though this is not a plain description but a coded gibe at supposedly Euripidean decadence. Cf. Ch. 3, 151–3.

not an outright justification, let alone a proclamation, of philosophical enmity towards poetry, as so many scholars have supposed.⁷⁷ It is a defensive, self-exculpating step on Socrates' part (marked directly by the fearing clause at 607b, 'lest she convict us', μή... ἡμῶν... καταγνῶ) and in some sense on Plato's part too: a gesture towards trying to move *beyond* the quarrel, not towards exacerbating it. The core of what Socrates wishes to say to poetry in this context, and therefore in effect to (some of) Plato's readers, is in three stages: first, please do not convict us of philistinism, since we actually share a sensitivity and an attachment to *mousikê* (which, after all, the Muses in book 8 had marked as essential to the continuity of the ideal city);⁷⁸ secondly, *we* have not created the tensions between philosophy and poetry (consider the gibes and insults that poetry has hurled against philosophers); and, thirdly, *we* ourselves are prepared to envisage a *rapprochement* between poetry and philosophy—indeed, we would like nothing less than to reverse the verdict of 'banishment' and to welcome (mimetic) poetry back to the city (607c).⁷⁹

Before (or while) looking more closely at that last, crucial point, we must register a further dimension of the judicial imagery of the whole epilogue. I have already mentioned Socrates' idea that he and Glaucon have been engaged in 'defending' their earlier decision to exclude mimetic poetry from the city. It is the sense of a pressure to defend that decision which leads into the intricate expression of self-exculpation I have just summarized. But this self-exculpation includes an invitation to poetry to defend *herself* further against the charges brought by Socrates and Glaucon. The same verb, ἀπολογεῖσθαι,

⁷⁷ Nightingale (1995: 60–7) contends that the quarrel was invented by Plato, but her statement that Socrates 'concludes his attack... by announcing [*sic*] a quarrel', 66, erases the apologetic inflection of 607b, as do e.g. Reeve 1988: 221 ('Plato is ready to rejoin the... quarrel'), Asmis 1992a: 338 ('Plato expels... Homer... by [*sic*] observing that there is an ancient quarrel'), Corlett 2005: 71 (making the quarrel a *reason* for the banishment). Gadamer 1980: 46–7 discerns the correct nuance (but cf. n. 81 below), as does Ford 2002: 46 ('apologizes'). Rosen (2004: 315–16) accepts the pre-Platonic history of the 'quarrel', reading it as a tension between 'formalism' and 'didacticism'. Kannicht (1980) aligns the quarrel with contrasting values of knowledge and pleasure. On the two main presocratic critics of poetry, Heraclitus and Xenophanes, see Babut (1974, 1976). Most (2011) broadens, but also partly confuses, the terms of interpretation.

⁷⁸ *Resp.* 8.546d: neglect of the Muses/*mousikê* will be a cause of the decline of the city.

⁷⁹ Note that the personification used in the epilogue comes close to treating *all* poetry as mimetic; this is in keeping with earlier parts of the book: see n. 54 above.

‘defend oneself’, which Socrates used of himself at 607b is now applied, twice over, to poetry herself (607d, 608a).⁸⁰ This picks up the judicial imagery of 605c, where Socrates formulated the greatest charge or gravest ‘accusation’ (the verb there was the standard legal term, *κατηγορεῖν*). Taken together with the intervening image of the ‘ancient quarrel’, the double use of the verb ‘defend oneself’—with reference first to Socrates and Glaucon, then to poetry herself—suggests that the dispute is one in which the roles of prosecutor and defendant can easily be switched round, depending on the angle from which one regards the bone of contention. Who exactly is ‘on trial’? Poetry for her/its power to harm the soul, or Socrates and Glaucon for allegedly repudiating such an essential component of Greek culture and for thereby seeming to display philistinism and boorishness (this last anxiety itself couched in the quasi-judicial language of convicting or condemning, *καταγιγνώσκειν*, 607b)?

Reading Plato fastidiously—which some readers might equate with reading him, at least in part, like a poet—requires careful attention to subtle figurations of this kind. In the present instance we are confronted not just by clues to and echoes of a contemporary background of debate, but, even more importantly, by an elaborately layered metaphor for the inconclusiveness (the *internal* inconclusiveness) of the *Republic*’s second critique of poetry.⁸¹ Having initiated the idea of a trial by bringing the gravest of ‘charges’ against poetry, Socrates then places himself in the position of defendant (against possible ‘condemnation’ from *outside* the text, i.e. from lovers of poetry reading the *Republic*), and, in a further move, shifts the judicial onus back onto poetry (and/or her spokesmen, *προστάται*)⁸² to make a new

⁸⁰ I follow most modern editors in reading *ἀπολογησαμένη*, not *ἀπολογησομένη*, at 607d3: poetry must defend herself in order to return, not return in order to deliver her defence. But in ‘real’ terms, poetry can only deliver a defence if she is not in exile: hence the importance of Socrates and Glaucon ‘continuing to listen’ to her; see 194–9 below.

⁸¹ It is a lapse in Schleiermacher’s introduction to the *Republic* to claim that Socrates denies poetry will ever be able to defend herself properly, though Schleiermacher later admits, obliquely, that this same passage modifies the idea of banishment: Schleiermacher 1996: 376, tr. in Dobson 1836: 400–1; cf. n. 87 below. Cf. the misleading phrase ‘permanent exile’ in Gadamer 1980: 39.

⁸² After imagining poetry delivering her own defence at 607d, Socrates invokes her spokesmen, the ‘lovers of poetry’: (i) metaphorically, this gives poetry the identity of a metic (required by Athenian law to have a *προστάτης*: cf. Todd 1993: 197–8), as well as trading on the fact that no *woman* could speak for herself in an Athenian court; (2) literally, the assumption is that an extensive ‘poetics’ could hardly be accommodated

defence against the charges brought—and a new defence whose success Socrates himself would gladly welcome ('we would be happy to receive her back into the city', ἄσμενοι ἂν καταδεχοίμεθα, 607c), since he and Glaucon 'know intimately' their susceptibility to poetry's bewitchment (σύνισμέν γε ἡμῖν αὐτοῖς κηλουμένοις ὑπ' αὐτῆς, *ibid.*).

Before examining this last strand further, we need to grasp the central paradox built into the forensic imagery of the epilogue. It is not just that the imagery expresses the idea of an unfinished series of trials and retrials, with accuser and accused changing places. Rather, Socrates behaves quite unlike a real litigant by hoping for his opponent's *success*. (Picture a real-life, especially an Athenian, plaintiff who says, 'I would dearly love the defendant to come up with a better defence') The judicial trope that unfolds from 605c to 608a is, in sum, a pointed marker both of inconclusiveness (it is far from certain, even now, that the sentence of banishment should be implemented) and of ambivalence (it is far from certain that Socrates and Glaucon *want* poetry to be banished). To ignore these complications in the epilogue to the discussion of poetry is to miss something vital in the way in which Plato is communicating with his readers.⁸³

But the complications extend much further than the paradoxes of Socrates' judicial imagery. Explaining his and Glaucon's attitude of goodwill towards poetry (εὐμενῶς, 607d, εὖνοι, 608a: an attitude incompatible, notice, with hostility towards poetry),⁸⁴ the goodwill of people who have tried to force themselves to give up their erotic passion for a woman they loved in their youth, Socrates introduces the motif of an incantation to be 'sung' for self-protection while *listening* to poetry, until it becomes clear whether she can deliver an

within a poetic work itself (Plato has not envisaged a full *ars poetica* in verse), though this does not make the idea of a poetic defence simply 'playful', pace Murray 1996: 232. Naddaff 2002: 125 (by inviting a new defence Socrates 'announces before the fact the defense's defeat') makes the passage perversely self-confounding.

⁸³ Hegel is among the few modern philosophers to have questioned, if obliquely and somewhat vaguely, whether Plato intended poetry's 'banishment': 'Plato did not banish art from his state, he only refused to let it remain any longer as a god' ('Plato hat nicht die Kunst aus seinem Staate verbannt, sondern sie nur nicht mehr als Gott stehen lassen wollen'), Hegel 1923: 639. I owe this reference to Karelis 1979: p. xxix n. 2.

⁸⁴ Given Socrates' defensiveness about 'harshness' or severity, ἀγροικία, at 607b (n. 75 above), the antithesis of εὐμενής and ἄγριος at *Resp.* 3.416b is a *propos*. εὐμενής is incompatible with enmity: e.g. *Resp.* 5.471a. To listen in this way implies a willingness to learn: cf. *Leg.* 4.718d, 723a.

adequate defence of herself after all (607e–608b).⁸⁵ Although the passage as a whole somewhat blurs the distinction between listening to a further defence of poetry and listening to the performance of poetry in general (and the blurring is increased by the possibility that poetry might defend herself *in poetry*: 607d), it is certainly insufficient to treat 608a–b as referring exclusively to listening to a defence independently of listening to poetry *per se*.⁸⁶ When the latter is Socrates' primary meaning, at 607d (where the reference is to a defence delivered in prose by poetry's spokesmen), he says, 'we shall listen graciously' (εὐμενῶς ἀκουσόμεθα), without any suggestion of exposure to the force of poetic seductiveness. By contrast, the incantation metaphor evokes a need for urgent protection in a situation of active danger, the danger posed by poetry's capacity to bewitch or entrance: here, accordingly, Socrates refers unequivocally to continuing to listen to poetry herself (ἀκροασόμεθ' αὐτῆς, 608a). The incantation passage therefore raises two pressing issues of interpretation. The first is why Socrates and Glaucon will continue listening to poetry at all, if the case for poetry's banishment has already been clinched: why can they not just live without her? The detail is striking, though often simply ignored by critics; or if not ignored, then found awkward, as when Schleiermacher struggles with it by turning it into the paradoxical idea of listening to the magic of poetry as if one did not hear it at all.⁸⁷ The second issue is: what does Socrates imply by speaking of protection against poetry as an 'incantation', particularly one to be sung or chanted *while* listening to poetic performance itself?

It is only a partial solution to the first of those problems to say that Socrates speaks for philosophers who must live in the world of an actual city like Athens, where it is inconceivable that poetry (especially the

⁸⁵ The incantation metaphor borrows some force from the erotic analogy with which it becomes linked. Where *erōs* is concerned, incantations are most commonly employed to attract someone: e.g. Xen. *Mem.* 3.11.16–18. But Plato probably alludes (obliquely) to the use of spells by passive victims as well as active users of erotic 'magic' (cf. n. 99 below): compare Callim. *Epigr.* 46.1–2, with Winkler 1990: 79–98, for a conspectus of such practices.

⁸⁶ Janaway 1995: 153, with n. 44, rightly opposes Gould 1990: 221, with n. 13, on this point. The narrower interpretation (listening to poetry's defence qua defence and not qua poetry) is adopted also by e.g. Leszl 2004: 179.

⁸⁷ Schleiermacher 1996: 376 ('man . . . [ihre Zaubereien] anhören müsse als hörte man nicht'); tr. in Dobson 1836: 401. Socrates' reference to continuing to 'listen' to poetry is ignored even by so acute reader as Burnyeat 1999: 287: Socrates 'has forsworn [Homer] for good' (corrected spelling). Cf. n. 81 above.

works of Homer and the tragedians) could cease to exist in the foreseeable future. That is a pertinent consideration, but it cannot be the whole story. Since Socrates also speaks for those who, as this very passage underlines (608b), acknowledge ‘the city in the soul’, the question remains: why, even in a non-ideal city, will Socrates and Glaucon not do everything possible to *stop* listening to poetry? Why will they not ‘exile’ poetry from their internal city, even if she still inhabits the material city in which they find themselves? The most cogent answer to this question is, I believe, both radical and yet in a sense obvious: Socrates speaks here for philosophers *who do not want or intend* to abandon poetry entirely or permanently. The answer is obvious in that it is not only embedded in the language of continuing to listen to poetry but expressively intimated by the psychological and erotic imagery of the epilogue as a whole.⁸⁸ It is radical, however, in that it undermines any doctrinally rigid reading of the *Republic* which takes the ‘banishment’ of the best, most imaginative poets to be Plato’s final word on the subject.

When Socrates submits to Glaucon that they would be pleased to be able to welcome poetry back from exile, he cites the experience of being ‘bewitched’ by poetry (κηλεῖσθαι, 607c) as his very *reason* for not wanting to see poetry actually banished. The word-group of κηλεῖν and κήλησις, long associated with the psychotropic powers of song and poetry in Greek thought, is often of either negative or uncertain shading in Plato’s work, where it usually describes a non-rational susceptibility to the emotionally ‘spellbinding’ qualities of certain uses of language or music.⁸⁹ Earlier in book 10 itself, Socrates directly connected poetic bewitchment (κήλησις, 601b) with the integral musico-verbal fabric of poetry, as opposed to its paraphrasable content: he suggested that the effect, though powerfully natural

⁸⁸ Murray (2003: 6) thinks Plato’s imagery reinforces his arguments against mimetic poetry, but her reference to *Resp.* 607b–608a ignores the emotional ambivalence conveyed by the erotic imagery of the passage. Gastaldi (2007: 145), who shows more sensitivity than most to the importance of the epilogue, nonetheless blunts the force of the imagined reversal of banishment and the idea of ‘continuing to listen’ to poetry by speaking of anticipation of a ‘new’ form of poetry: this cannot explain why Socrates is so interested in the possibility of recovering *Homer*.

⁸⁹ Homeric κηληθμός: *Od.* 11.334 ~ 13.2, referring to the hero’s own storytelling but near-synonymous with θέλγειν as used of song (Ch. 2 n. 19). For Platonic uses of κηλεῖν, ἐπάδειν, etc., see Louis 1945: 69–70, 221, Belfiore 1980: the latter’s interesting analysis makes Plato’s usage more codified than I would. Verdenius (1983: 36 with n. 104), lumping things together indiscriminately, misses the crucial point that bewitchment is the *reason* for Socrates’ desire to bring poetry back at *Resp.* 10.607c.

(operating ‘by nature’, φύσει), is suspect precisely because it cannot be traced back to a rationally transparent basis in what the poetry ‘says’.⁹⁰ In the present instance, at 607c, the connotations of erotic seductiveness attaching to *κηλεῖν* and its cognates allow Socrates’ use of the verb to blend into the larger scenario which he builds around his personification of poetry as a sensuously alluring woman.⁹¹

Socrates compares himself and Glaucon to people who, when young, felt passionate desire (*erôs*) for a woman but later decided that their passion was harmful and consequently tried to force themselves (607e) to keep their distance from her and end the relationship. Like the rest of the epilogue, this simile is saturated with ambivalence. The former lover, on this scenario, has not really lost his *erôs*; it is ‘ingrained’ or ingrown in the soul, as Socrates indicates of his and Glaucon’s passion for poetry,⁹² which is why psychological compulsion (*βία*) is needed to maintain distance from the object of desire. If there is a touch of irony in Socrates’ reference to ‘the fine regimes’ in which the likes of himself and Glaucon grew up, this certainly does not cancel out his reiteration that the passion in question is the *reason* they continue to feel well disposed towards this ‘woman’ and eager that she should be seen at her ‘best and truest’ (*βελτίστην καὶ ἀληθεστάτην*, 608a), a phrase which endows the woman with a better and worse self. The erotic simile, then, reinforces the earlier hope (607c) that it might yet prove possible to welcome poetry back to the city (and the soul).

⁹⁰ At 3.401d the same elements of music as picked out in poetry at 601a–b (rhythm, including metre, and *harmonia*, roughly ‘melodic pattern’, including musical ‘mode’), are said to ‘enter the interior of the soul’ (*καταδύεται εἰς τὸ ἐντὸς τῆς ψυχῆς*) and take hold of it intensely (*ἐρρωμενέστατα ἄπτεται αὐτῆς*): the process is sub-conceptual (prior to *logos*, 402a) yet capable of shaping the soul’s ethical ‘form’ (400d–402d); on the implications for music itself, see Barker 2005: 39–54, Brancacci 2008: 90–5, Schofield 2010. With the ‘natural’ status of verbal bewitchment, cf. the natural force of creativity at *Ap.* 22c: nn. 20, 25 above.

⁹¹ The erotic associations of *κήλησις* terms are evident at e.g. Ibycus 287.3 *PMG*, Eur. *Tro.* 893.

⁹² The perfect participle *ἐγγεγονότα*, 607e, denotes a continuing presence. Murray (1996: 232) oddly says that this clause ‘is presented almost as an excuse for P[laton]’s love of poetry’. The dramatic point is eloquent; Socrates speaks as someone whose love of poetry can never be fully eradicated. (Note also the present tense in Socrates’ question at 607c, ‘are you too not bewitched (*οὐ κηλῇ*) by poetry...?’) The verb *ἐγγίγνεσθαι* is common in Plato, often denoting how something good/bad takes a strong hold in the soul (e.g. *Chrm.* 157a, *Grg.* 504e, *Resp.* 4.439c) or the city (e.g. *Resp.* 5.456e, 8.552c, 564b); some examples discussed in Herrmann 2007: 77–91, and for another application of the verb to *erôs*, see Isoc. 10.55 (*Helen*).

But the psychology of the simile is conflicted. Socrates revealingly expresses concern about 'falling back' (πάλιν ἐμπεσεῖν) into a passion which he calls 'juvenile' and belonging to 'the many', i.e. characteristic of the culture as a whole. In the imagistic terms of his sexual analogy, this description conjures up an immature, adolescent passion for a woman who attracts many lovers: most obviously, a *hetaira* or courtesan.⁹³ Decoded, so to speak, into a cultural evaluation, it displays seeming condescension towards the widespread and non-exclusive status of love of poetry in a community such as Athens, a love typically implanted during the formative period of boyhood (as Socrates himself had confessed at 595b). But on both levels the gesture of would-be distancing from former experiences does not erase but actually accentuates the sense of mixed feelings: *anxiety* about 'falling back' in love is superimposed on a declaration of continuing 'goodwill'; and the result is a sort of bittersweet mixture of impulses, especially when we keep in mind Socrates' earlier admission that 'even the best of us' continue to surrender to the emotions of Homeric and tragic poetry (605d). Unlike those who cite the negative without the counterbalancingly regretful elements of the epilogue, I contend that Socrates speaks in the voice of one who does not unambiguously disown the experience in question but who wishes, as he says at 607d–e, to find an ethical justification for continuing to have that experience. He speaks, that is, as someone who ideally wants to transform the value of his relationship to the object of his *erôs*, not to abandon the relationship altogether.

If this means, then, that Socrates represents the philosophical (ex-)lover of poetry,⁹⁴ and in a manner which makes poetry an object

⁹³ See 603b for the explicit casting of mimesis in general in the role of *hetaira*, seducing the lower part of the soul; cf. Halliwell 1988: 135. Might the intimate vocative ὦ φίλε ἑταῖρε (cf. Halliwell 1995: 90–6) wilyly allude to the *hetaira* image? It is inappropriate to call the *erôs* of 607e–608a 'sinful', pace Murray 1996: 24. The adj. παιδικός, 'juvenile' or 'boyish', 608a, is sometimes associated by Plato with the idea of play (*paidia*) and therefore as the antithesis of σπουδαῖος, 'serious': see esp. *Crat.* 406b–c. Such an overtone at 608a would meld nicely with the wording of the incantation itself in the following sentence, as discussed in my text below. *Paidikos* is not intrinsically derogatory: see e.g. *Lysis* 211a. 'Infantile', Ober 1998: 225, is too strong a translation, and his emphasis on the democratic subtext of the passage seems to me overstated (the 'demotic ideology' of tragedy, though foregrounded elsewhere, is hardly apparent at 605c–606b).

⁹⁴ It is not only here that the Platonic Socrates is a (wistful) lover of poetry; to say he 'normally displays a thoroughgoing hostility towards poets of all descriptions' (Rowe 1986: 151) is a wild exaggeration. In addition to many admiring poetic references (e.g. *Lysis* 214a, *Phdo* 94d–95a, *Symp.* 209a–d, *Meno* 81b), *Ap.* 41a–b is

of wistful ambivalence not outright hostility, that goes some way towards answering the first of the two questions I picked out earlier: why should Socrates and Glaucon not simply *stop* listening to poetry? But it might seem to do so only at the cost of complicating even further my second question: what does Socrates mean by singing an ‘incantation’ while listening to poetry? In one respect, however, the answer proposed to the first question is part of an answer to the second too. It is precisely because of the ambivalent combination of *attraction and resistance* that the lover of poetry will continue to listen to poetry (while sustaining the hope of finding a justification for doing so) yet will also feel the need for a protective incantation.

But what exactly does Socrates imply by the metaphor of an incantation? On one level it is clear enough that the metaphor involves a kind of contest between the emotional ‘magic’ of poetic language and the counter-magic of philosophical rationalism. But it is not sufficient to maintain, as some have done, that the incantation represents a purely rationalistic reinterpretation of the old Greek motif—prominent in Homer and given a fresh statement in Gorgias’ *Helen*—of the ‘magic of words’. I earlier gave three reasons for not equating the incantation, which is for those fearful of resuccumbing to the quasi-erotic bewitchment of poetry, with the ‘antidote’ or drug of 595b, which is the knowledge (fully possessed only by perfect philosophers) that would give *immunity* against the power of poetry. It is possible, admittedly, to find passages in Plato where drugs and incantations operate together, including the riddling passage of *Charmides* in which Socrates talks of a ‘Thracian’ cure for headaches that combines both kinds of remedy.⁹⁵ But the two passages of *Republic* 10 give no hint of such a medical model. Instead, they keep the two

telling: Socrates would be prepared to ‘die many times’ to spend eternity talking to Hesiod and Homer in Hades. The ‘wistful’ tone of *Resp.* 607c–d is rightly diagnosed, and read as Platonic autobiography, by Shorey 1930–35: II. lxiii, 1938: 137–8; but he does not pursue the further complications of 607d–608b.

⁹⁵ *Chrm.* 155e, leading into a passage on the combined soul-and-body medicine of the Thracian ‘doctors of Zalmoxis’ (156–8): at the end of the dialogue Socrates suggests that possession of true virtue would make the incantation unnecessary (176a); at the same time we are left with the image of Socrates himself as the great user of (philosophical) incantations (176b). Cf. the (allegorical) midwives at *Tht.* 149d. Another passage which combines the language of drugs (*φαρμάττειν*) and incantations (*κατεπάδευ*) is *Meno* 80a, significantly describing Socrates’ own quasi-magical mesmerism (*γοητεύειν*: n. 99 below) over the minds of others; for Gorgianic precedents see Ch. 6, 267, 274. The image of Socratic incantations, a variant of which

things separate, as they sometimes were in practice in the professional medicine of the Hippocratics; and it employs the metaphor of an incantation to evoke a rather insecure, apprehensive frame of mind (one which possibly carries some resonance of Orphic and Pythagorean practices as well).⁹⁶ The incantation of 608a, then, is for those who *lack* the drug or antidote of 595b. Anyone who had the antidote would have no need of incantations.

The idea of an incantation denotes, moreover, at least a partly non-epistemic and emotionally self-persuasive device. It is to be ‘sung’ by the person himself, not by a doctor or healer; and it is implicitly in need of repetition, as suggested by the indefinite clause in 608a (‘for as long as poetry is unable to defend herself (ὥς δ’ ἂν μὴ οἷα τ’ ἦ ἀπολογήσασθαι . . .), we shall listen to her . . .’). In all these respects the closest Platonic comparandum is to be found at *Phaedo* 77e. There, after purporting to furnish arguments that souls exist both before and after their incarnate lives, Socrates acknowledges that there remains a ‘child’ of fear inside Cebes and Simmias—fear that their souls will be scattered to the winds at death. Cebes, admitting the existence of this inner child, asks Socrates to try to persuade them out of their fear (πειρῶ ἀναπεῖθαι); Socrates responds by telling them to ‘sing an incantation’ over this child every day (ἐπάδειν αὐτῷ ἐκάστης ἡμέρας).⁹⁷ As in *Republic* 10, there is a friction between the

is found also at Xen. *Mem.* 3.11.16–18, was later used satirically by Timon of Phlius fr. 25 (Diels/di Marco). Cf. n. 107 below.

⁹⁶ The list of therapies at *Resp.* 4.426b involves a division (marked by οὐδ’ αὖ), overlooked by e.g. Giuliano 2005: 131, between purely physical and more psychosomatic processes; this suggests a viewpoint from which incantations are considered a more drastic option. Note the parallel division (relating to means of harm) at *Leg.* 11.932e–933a, and for this kind of view in Hippocratic medicine, cf. Lloyd 1979: 15–16, 40, 42. Plutarch recognizes such a division in his echo of *Resp.* 608b at *Mor.* 920c. For connections between *epôdai* (literal or metaphorical) and persuasion (sometimes affective rather than fully rational), see e.g. *Leg.* 2.659e, 664b–c (both referring to choral poetry itself), 6.773d, 8.837e; cf. n. 99 below on Gorgias’ *Helen*. Untersteiner (1966: 147) underestimates the non-rational implications of *epôdê* at *Resp.* 608a (and elsewhere in Plato); Rutherford (1995: 236–7) notes the ambiguity involved in answering poetic with philosophical ‘magic’. We know that, among others, Orphics could be thought of as using *epôdai*: see Eur. *Cyc.* 646; cf. the Derveni papyrus col. 6.2, Betegh 2004: 14. The evidence for Pythagorean use of *epôdai* is late (e.g. Iambl. *Vita Pyth.* 164, 244) but probably rooted in earlier practice. Cf. Laín Entralgo (1958) for a broader thesis about Platonic incantations.

⁹⁷ Although Socrates suggests his friends might seek someone to sing an incantation for them (78a), he hints it is best to perform their own, a point later reiterated in relation to his own myth (114d). On ‘incantations’ and the ‘child in the soul’ in later

rational force of philosophical *logos* and the recalcitrant power of (perhaps irrational) emotion: the metaphor of ‘incantation’ relates to the attempt to enable the former to prevail over the latter. There is, however, a fundamental difference between these two contexts. Cebes and Simmias have no *wish* to be afraid of death (quite the reverse), whereas in the *Republic* Socrates and Glaucon have experienced an *erôs* for and entrancement in poetry that they find it hard to abandon and to which at least one part of their soul continues to feel strongly drawn.

But there remains a profound paradox which has never, to my knowledge, been properly addressed yet needs to be integrated into an interpretation of *Republic* 608a. This paradox consists in the fact that while the incantation is equivalent to the argument or *logos* of the second critique of poetry (608a, τοῦτον τὸν λόγον ὃν λέγομεν, makes that explicit), it is an incantation which is only provisional (as the future tense of ἀκροασόμεθα, ‘we shall [continue to] listen’, 608a, underlines) and which in itself *reiterates tensions* that were latent in the argument itself. Socrates specifies the twin propositional elements of the incantation: first, that ‘we should not take such poetry seriously as a serious means of grasping the truth’ (οὐ σπουδαστέον ἐπὶ τῇ τοιαύτῃ ποιήσει ὡς ἀληθείας τε ἀπτομένη καὶ σπουδαία); secondly, that ‘the one listening to it’ (notice, again, the assumption that poetry *will* be listened to, not actually banished from the city or soul of people like Socrates and Glaucon) ‘must be wary of it, out of fear for the constitution inside himself’ (εὐλαβητέον αὐτὴν ὃν τῷ ἀκροωμένῳ, περὶ τῆς ἐν αὐτῷ πολιτείας δεδιότι, 608a–b).

This paradoxical combination of thoughts matches the shape of the earlier critique, which treated mimetic poetry simultaneously as insubstantial, unreal, or specious (a phantom world of simulacra), yet also as capable of overwhelming the souls of ‘even the best of us’, as Socrates put it in stating ‘the greatest charge’ (605c). Critics of Plato sometimes complain that this conjunction of ideas is a weakness in the case that Socrates makes against poetry, a contradiction in Plato’s supposed ‘theory of art’ as a whole. I have suggested elsewhere, however, that it makes better sense to regard the anomaly as inherent

philosophical texts, see Erler (2003); cf. Dunshirn 2010: 45–7. Boyancé (1937: 155–65) takes the purpose of all Platonic myth to be an incantation for the child in the soul. Cf. children as a suitable object of ‘incantations’ (here = music/poetry itself) at e.g. *Leg.* 2.659d–e, 664b, 7.812c.

in the practices of ‘art’ itself, where fabrication, pretence, and artifice are indeed at work, yet can become the vehicles of imaginatively compelling and emotionally irresistible experience. If there is a problem here, it is a problem for aesthetics in general, not an isolated flaw in the thesis of *Republic* 10.⁹⁸

In the context of the incantation, the crucial consideration for my present analysis is that by recapitulating the tension or anomaly in question Socrates heightens the precariousness of the incantation, and therefore of the argument itself, as a means of providing protection against poetry. In the erotic terms of the preceding context, the incantation is rather like telling oneself that the woman one used to love is utterly insignificant and could never be taken seriously—but that one had better be perpetually vigilant in her presence against her ability to bewitch one back into a state of intense passion. Or, to glance back at the parallel incantation in the *Phaedo*, it would be like laughing at the triviality of death (as Socrates actually does in that dialogue)—and then reminding oneself how terrified one might become of it again at any moment. Why should Plato go out of his way, we ought to ask ourselves, to make Socrates not just recall the tensions visible in the earlier arguments but accentuate the fact that he and Glaucon currently have no better protection against poetry than to repeat those arguments in an anxious, quasi-magical act of self-persuasion?⁹⁹

The nub of my unorthodox answer to this question is that, far from presenting the ‘banishment’ of mimetic poets as the inevitable outcome of an irreconcilable conflict, Plato wishes to create a strong impression that the relationship between poetry and philosophy—more specifically, their relationship in the soul of the philosophical lover of poetry—remains an abiding problem, a piece of unfinished business which discursive reasoning alone cannot definitively resolve. If we allow the richly metaphorical writing of the epilogue its full

⁹⁸ See Halliwell 2002a: 59; cf. Feeney 1993: 238. Kamtekar (2008: 352 n. 38) takes a different tack.

⁹⁹ I use ‘quasi-magical’ guardedly; for reservations about counting incantations as magic, see Dickie 2001: 24–5. But there is evidence both in *Resp.* and elsewhere for distinguishing *ἐπωδαί* from purely physical treatments (n. 96 above) and for therefore taking metaphorical incantations to rely on something other than cognitive efficacy (see my text above on *Phdo* 77e). Plato was familiar with Gorgias’ description of the persuasive ‘magic’ (*γοητεία*: cf. n. 95 above) of ‘incantations’ (as a parallel to poetry) in his *Helen*, B11.10 DK (Ch. 6, 274). The *ἀλεξιφάρμακα* of Pl. *Plt.* 279c–d are classed as part of ‘magic’ at 280d–e.

weight, we are confronted, as I have tried to show, by a remarkable series of points: first, the seemingly reversible roles of prosecution and defence in the 'quarrel' between philosophy and poetry, together with the fact that the last thing Socrates wants is to be 'convicted' of philistine insensitivity to poetry; second, the deep ambivalence conveyed by Socrates' admission that he himself would welcome a new defence on the part of poetry, and would do so precisely because of his inwardness with the 'bewitchment' of listening to poetry like Homer's; third, the implication of Socrates' erotic analogy that he and Glaucon have not really lost their ingrained passion for poetry; fourth, the suggestion that Socrates and Glaucon will *continue* to listen to poetry and therefore never fully banish it from their lives; finally and most paradoxically, the trope of an 'incantation' whose protection against poetry retraces the form of book 10's own arguments—arguments, however, which reached their climax with the grave charge that 'even the best of us' (with very few exceptions) are unable to resist the overwhelming emotional impact of the greatest poetry.

Put all that together and the upshot of the second critique emerges as one of the most thought-provokingly equivocal conclusions to an argument to be found anywhere in Plato's mature work. In terms of the passage's intertwined strands of imagery, we can say that the 'trial' of poetry has reached a verdict which is only provisionally and uncertainly upheld; that the lover's passion is unlikely ever to die (hence the need for psychological 'force', 607e, to try to detach him from the object of his passion); and that the protective incantation will have to be repeated every time one comes into the presence of poetry, without ever permanently relieving the soul of the desire to listen to her.

Because it is equivalent to the arguments contained in book 10 itself, arguments which treat poetry as both mimetically 'unreal' and yet psychologically gripping, Socrates' incantation is a metaphor (though hardly a metaphor at all) for the reading of Plato's own work. Because it is embedded in a context which treats poetry as an ambiguous object of desire (thereby resonating with ideas at least as old as Homer: see Chapter 2), it is also part of the expression of a need to continue the search for a better justification of poetry, a justification which might reconcile 'pleasure' with 'benefit' (607d–e).¹⁰⁰ These

¹⁰⁰ Other important markers of a Platonic quest for a 'moral aesthetics', a fusion of beauty and goodness, include Diotima's remark at *Symp.* 209a (poets as 'begetters of sagacity and virtue' in, as her theory requires, a beautiful medium of words), *Resp.*

two implications of the passage converge. Plato's own engagement with poetry is unending; it never purports to have reached a final verdict. Far from banishing poetry from the 'soul' of his work (least of all the poetry of Homer), Plato's writing constantly responds to and lives with it on every level from verbal texture, via characterization and thematic development, to the creation of large-scale dramatic, narrative, and mythological structures.¹⁰¹ If it is true, as Bernard Williams claimed, that it is one of Plato's strengths 'that he can understand, not just the force of contrary arguments, but the power of an opposing vision', we can go even further than this where poetry is concerned: 'opposing visions' are themselves part-and-parcel of Plato's conception of the subject.¹⁰² There is an important sense in which Plato's own dialogues, like the persona of Socrates at *Republic* 608a, 'continue to listen' to the voices of poetry, if always against the background of protective philosophical incantations. As such, they call for readers who will somehow be prepared to do the same.¹⁰³

One illustration of what this might mean—adduced here with necessary brevity—is provided by the *Phaedo*, where Plato uses his own quasi-poetic art of writing precisely to show a philosophical way of coming to terms with the 'greatest charge' brought against poetry by Socrates in *Republic* 10. In the *Phaedo* Plato sets himself and his readers the challenge of 'containing', in both senses of the word, the possibility of intense surrender to tragic emotions, by making them available—both to Socrates' companions and to readers of the

3.401–3 (206 below), *Leg.* 2.656c, 658e, 665d, etc.: on *Symp.* cf. Asmis 1992a: 344–7, on *Laws* Halliwell 2002a: 65–70, with Bychkov 2010: 129–75, Halliwell 2011a: for broader perspectives on Platonic traditions in aesthetics. For the idea of the 'beneficial', *ὠφέλιμον*, see Ch. 3, 123–5, Ch. 6, 310–20; it is not quite right to say, with Liebert 2010a: 112, that *Resp.* 607d–e makes pleasure (not 'sweetness') and benefit 'inversely proportionate' (still less, 'mutually exclusive', Liebert 2010a: 114). Cf. *Grg.* 501–3 (with 474d–e) for a highly rhetorical accusation against poetry of seeking after pleasure rather than 'benefit', *Symp.* 173c (Apollodorus) for philosophy itself as (potentially) combining 'benefit' with intense pleasure.

¹⁰¹ This fact and some of its implications have received recognition most recently in Giuliano 2005; cf. Ford 2002: 223–5, on the incantation as the *Republic* itself. On Platonic quotations from poetry, see Halliwell (2000).

¹⁰² See Williams 1999: 11; Williams himself later speaks in passing of Plato's 'profound ambivalence' towards poetry and other arts, 1999: 29.

¹⁰³ For a reading of one particular dialogue, *Phaedrus*, as Plato's own response to the challenge of *Resp.* 607–8, see Nussbaum 1986: 203. Halliwell 2011c: 262–5 offers some thoughts—part speculative, part historical—on other ways of responding to Socrates' challenge.

dialogue—and yet counteracting and modifying them with an alternative philosophical perspective, namely the ability to transcend tragedy which is embodied and enacted in the character of Socrates. This double-sided aspect of *Phaedo* was shrewdly observed by Proclus, an acute if himself a ‘conflicted’ reader of the dialogues. In keeping with his larger goal of reconciling the greatest philosopher with the greatest poet, Proclus makes a telling comparison between Plato and Homer: ‘their use of mimesis moves our imagination in every way,’ he writes, ‘so that many readers weep with the wailing Apollodorus, and many share the grief of Achilles as he laments his friend’.¹⁰⁴ The *Phaedo* is one striking instance of how Plato’s own work continues to ‘listen’ to poetry and to exhibit a kind of emotional pull towards it, while nonetheless singing a protective incantation against surrender to it.¹⁰⁵

In this connection, there is a final point worth making, though its possible ramifications are immense. Socrates’ lingering *erôs* for poetry is based, as we saw, on an intimate familiarity with the experience of being ‘bewitched’ (*κηλεῖσθαι*) by poetry, above all by Homer, and by a desire to find a way of reconciling such experience with the imperatives of philosophical reason which he has advocated throughout the *Republic*—a way, one might say, of fusing poetic ecstasy with philosophical truth. There is something intrinsically counterintuitive here. Bewitchment (*κήλησις*) in Plato typically suggests a non-rational seduction of the mind, a type of experience inaccessible and inaccountable to discursive analysis and akin to the compelling ‘magnetism’ of ecstasy which the central section of *Ion* connects with inspiration. Why should Socrates conceive of wanting to preserve a mode of experience which poses a threat, as he stresses himself, to the supremacy of reason?

The best answer we can give to this large question, I think, is that in addition to his relentless rationalism Socrates in Plato is also always a

¹⁰⁴ καὶ γὰρ τὴν φαντασίαν ἡμῶν κινεῖ παντοίως ἢ τῶνδε τῶν ἀνδρῶν μίμησις καὶ τὰς δόξας μετατίθησιν καὶ συμμεταμορφοῖ τοῖς ὑποκειμένοις πράγμασιν, ὥστε πολλοὺς μὲν Ἀπολλοδώρῳ συνδακρύνει ἀναβρυχωμένῳ, πολλοὺς δὲ Ἀχιλλεῖ θρηνοῦντι τὸν φίλον: Procl. *In R.* 1.163.27–164.4. See Halliwell 2002a: 330 for the context, 323–34 for Proclus’ shifting attempts to reconcile Homer and Plato; cf. my further discussion of Proclus in Halliwell 2011a.

¹⁰⁵ On this aspect of the *Phaedo*, as well as the rather different ‘rewriting’ of tragedy in the myth of Er, see Halliwell 2006: 115–28, 2007: 450–2; on the myth of Er cf. also Cerri 2007: 67–77.

devotee of *erôs*, and *erôs* is central to a Platonic vision of how philosophy can redeem the soul. If poetry can seduce the soul with a sort of rapture in words and images (not least by drawing it into intense involvement in the imagined ‘experiences of others’, ἀλλότρια πάθη, *Resp.* 10.606b), it has a psychagogic power which Platonic philosophy itself would ideally like to make its own.¹⁰⁶ It can hardly be irrelevant here to recall that however suspect ‘bewitchment’ may sometimes seem in Plato, it is actually associated in two places (by Alcibiades in the *Symposium* and by Glaucon in the *Republic* itself) with Socrates’ own strangely seductive character, including his ability to reduce others to tears.¹⁰⁷ Control of ‘bewitchment’ is indeed part of the quarrel between philosophy and poetry, but a quarrel played out in the soul of Plato’s own writings.

There is no definitive way of coming to terms with the marked ambivalence of Socrates’ epilogue to the *Republic*’s second critique of poetry, including his desire to find a way of reconciling poetry with philosophy. As I have tried to show, this epilogue invites its readers, as pointedly as anything in Plato, to continue the debate outside the text. Yet it uses its own ‘incantation’ to express hesitation about whether the invitation could ever produce a solution that would meet the highest standards of reason. It does not, however, diminish the significance of the passage—quite the reverse—to conclude that it adumbrates a challenge and a problem to which no easy solution was (or is) in sight. What Socrates voices is the aspiration to a way of ‘listening’ to poetry that will be compatible with the values of philosophical reason, but which will not have to sacrifice the eroticized bewitchment he has felt in his experiences of Homer. He hopes to discover, whether directly from poetry itself or from its advocates, what form a reconfigured *erôs* for poetic beauty might take, an *erôs* which would fulfil the principle of book 3 that ‘the domain of the musical arts should find its goal in the erotics of the beautiful’ (δεῖ δέ που τελευτᾶν τὰ μουσικὰ εἰς τὰ τοῦ καλοῦ ἐρωτικά).¹⁰⁸ Despite all the

¹⁰⁶ For my use of ‘psychagogic’, cf. the vocabulary of *psuchagôgein* etc. in Plato: Ch. 5, 225.

¹⁰⁷ *Symp.* 215b–16a (comparison with the music of Marsyas and of Corybantic rites; cf. Ch. 5, 244–7), *Resp.* 2.358b (metaphorical snake-charming), with *κηλεῖν* in both places. Recall here the notion of Socratic incantations, n. 95 above. Cf. Blondell 2002: 106, Worman 2008: 193, Baumgarten 2009: 95–8.

¹⁰⁸ *Resp.* 3.403c; for a modern if ironic parallel, cf. Sontag 1983: 104, ‘In place of a hermeneutics we need an erotics of art’, with Ch. 1 n. 13. Annas (1981: 95–101) strains

uncertainty with which book 10 surrounds it, that is a hope which defines, for Plato's own work and for the larger history of platonism, what it means to be a philosophical lover of poetry.

to minimize the positive aesthetic principles outlined at *Resp.* 401–3. Nehamas (2007: 73) overlooks this passage in saying, 'Plato himself did not include art among the proper expressions of culture'; contrast Burnyeat 1999: esp. 217–22.

Aristotle and the Experience of Tragic Emotion

The night before, two doubtful words had halted him at the very portals of the *Poetics*. Those words were ‘tragedy’ and ‘comedy’ . . . Averroës laid down his quill. He told himself (without conviction) that what we seek is often near at hand . . .

(Borges)¹

EMOTIONAL UNDERSTANDING IN THE *POETICS*

The creation and experience of poetry, according to Aristotle’s *Poetics*, have deep roots in the workings of human nature: the existence of poetry is the result of an innate propensity and aptitude for mimesis (*Poet.* 4.1448b4–20). That propensity, which Aristotle sees displayed in children’s play, in turn expresses an impulse to understand the world. Chapter 4 of the *Poetics* implicitly presents the natural aetiology of poetry as an illustration of one of the most famous of all Aristotelian principles, that human beings possess an inbuilt desire for knowledge (*Met.* 1.1, 980a21).² Philosophy itself is the supreme

¹ Averroës’ Search, in Borges 2000: 236.

² Eco (2004: 249), part stimulating part wayward, ascribes to Aristotle a ‘biology of narrativity’. Mimesis, however, may be broader than narrativity; it also includes e.g. the expression of emotion in music; see 239–41 below. The *Poetics* treats the history of poetry as a quasi-biological phenomenon: natural causes ‘begot’ or ‘gave birth’ to it (*γεννᾶν*), 4.1448b4; cf. the natural creativity of individual poets, *ibid.* 22–3, with Ch. 6 n. 154, Ch. 7 n. 29 for other uses of *γεννᾶν*. I avoid throughout the reductive

outgrowth, the ultimate fulfilment, of that desire, but its elaborate procedures of enquiry, abstraction, and argument are only for the few, whereas the basic urge to make sense of things is a property of the human mind in general. Poetry cultivates and rewards this urge by developing the trait which makes humans 'the most mimetic of animals' (*Poet.* 4.1448b7), in effect *homo mimeticus*. That trait involves interpreting the world by means of simulated, imaginative (re)modelling of life. It is axiomatic for Aristotle, moreover, that the propensity for mimesis is naturally accompanied by affective-cum-evaluative reactions—of attraction or repulsion, approval or disapproval—towards all the many possibilities of human action and suffering.³

Mimetic activity constitutes a spectrum which runs from children's play-acting to the most sophisticated practices of artistic representation. Such practices, which include visual art, music, dance, and theatre, offer their audiences opportunities for a kind of 'contemplation' (*theôria*, cf. *Poet.* 4.1448b11–16) which entails processes of understanding and recognition (denoted by Aristotle's use of the Greek verb *μανθάνειν* and its cognates, 1448b7–16). Those processes provide a framework in which cognition and emotion can function closely together to produce intensely engaged responses to the phenomena mimetically embodied in the form of individual artworks or performances. And as we shall see, emotion for Aristotle is itself a vehicle of ethical judgement: where his conception of the experience of an art such as tragedy is concerned, nothing could be more misleading than the claim that there is a conflict between moral feelings and cognitive alertness.⁴

translation of mimesis as 'imitation': Halliwell (2002a) offers extensive justification of this position; see 177–93 with Halliwell (2001) on the mimetic 'understanding' posited in *Poetics* 4; but a minimalist tendency persists in readings of the latter, e.g. in Tsitsiridis (2005), Heath (2009: 62–4).

³ Note how at *Poet.* 4.1448b24 ff. the introduction of ethical terms for poetry's early development follows on seamlessly from Aristotle's account of the mimetic instinct which explains the existence of poetry. Cf. Aristotle's assumption at 2.1448a1–18 that mimesis automatically brings with it evaluatively coloured depictions of human agents.

⁴ *Contra* Seamon (2006: 255): 'If we are morally judging we are not going to be cognitively alert.' Seamon mistakenly treats *Poet.* 13.1452b34–6 as a rejection of 'moral feelings' *tout court*, overlooking the fact that pity and fear themselves entail moral judgement; cf. nn. 105–6 below. The thesis of Curran (2001) that the *Poetics* does not allow for genuinely 'critical thinking' by spectators neglects (among other things) the full implications of 'understanding and reasoning' (*μανθάνειν καὶ συλλογίζεσθαι*) at 1448b16, on which see Halliwell (2001: 94–5).

But if poetry has value by virtue of its capacity to activate what I shall call a concentrated ‘emotional understanding’ of life, how far can we flesh out the brief sketch of a philosophical anthropology of mimesis supplied by chapter 4 of the *Poetics*? Can we say more precisely how Aristotle supposes that audiences learn and understand things about the world through engaged experience of mimetic works? Does such learning make mimesis, contrary to Plato’s critique, a potential medium of truth about the world? But how can truth be found in mimetic practices which Aristotle himself allows to have considerable freedom of imaginative selection and shaping, a freedom, for example, to ignore the kind of truth a philosopher might recognize and instead depict the sorts of things that ‘people say and think’ (25.1460b35–1461a1: see below)? How, in addition, does the seemingly fictionalizing imperative of mimesis—which requires that even if a poet takes his material from history he must nonetheless ‘(re-)make’ it (ποιεῖν) for his own purposes (9.1451b27–32)—affect the nature of the emotions it arouses? And is there anything left to say about the relevance to these issues of the notorious term catharsis, whose place in the *Poetics* continues to be a matter of vexed disagreement (and has recently come under attack, from more than one quarter, as an interpolation)? These are some of the questions which the argument of the present chapter will try to investigate. In order to do so, I would like to approach some of the underlying assumptions of Aristotle’s philosophy of poetry from a slightly oblique angle.

In the course of *Poetics* 25, one of the most compressed but intriguing chapters of the treatise, Aristotle sets out a kind of manifesto of critical principles that can be used to resolve or come to terms with certain sorts of ‘problems’ raised by other critics about particular passages of poetry—above all, passages of Homer.⁵ Although some of the details are rather knotty, the discussion is introduced with a trio of far-reaching premises. The first of these is that the poet, like the painter, is a mimetic ‘image-maker’ (εἰκονοποιός, the only surviving classical occurrence of this term) whose depictional choices encompass more than one way of looking at the world: he can choose, in any instance, to represent ‘the kinds of things which were or are the case’ (i.e. things conforming to known actualities, past or present), or ‘the

⁵ On the ancestry of interest in poetic ‘problems’, cf. Hunter (2009: 21–5).

kinds of things people say and think' (i.e. prevailing patterns of belief and collective mentalities, including mythology and religion), or, finally, 'the kinds of things that ought to be the case' (i.e. an idealized version of reality, whether the idealization is ethical or of some other type).⁶ The second premise is that poetry is allowed a special range of linguistic registers which differentiate it (in degrees varying by genre, as chapter 22 of the *Poetics* explains) from ordinary forms of speech or discourse. And the final premise is that 'poetry's standard of correctness is not the same as that of politics [or, therefore, of ethics] or of any other technical expertise' (οὐχ ἡ αὐτὴ ὁρθότης ἐστὶν τῆς πολιτικῆς καὶ τῆς ποιητικῆς οὐδὲ ἄλλης τέχνης καὶ ποιητικῆς, 25.1460b13–15).

Part of the point of that last statement, which contradicts a position hypothetically espoused by Socrates in Plato's *Ion*, is to support the tenet that it is not necessarily or intrinsically a poetic fault to represent the world in a way which contravenes the facts of, say, medicine or animal biology. (We shall shortly see how Aristotle clarifies this tenet with a specific zoological example.) It is also meant to counter such things as the inappropriate grammatical criticism of poetry allegedly practised by Protagoras and dismissed earlier in the *Poetics*: to argue over whether the speech act directed to the Muse at the start of the *Iliad* ('Sing, Muse, . . .') should correctly be classed as a prayer or an instruction, Aristotle thinks, is a matter for a kind of linguistics, not for a judgement of poetic quality.⁷ The broader statement, however, that 'poetry's standard of correctness is not the same as that of politics' is more problematic and calls for delicate consideration, since

⁶ ἐπεὶ γὰρ ἐστὶ μιμητῆς ὁ ποιητὴς ὡςπερ αὖτε ζωγράφος ἢ τις ἄλλος εἰκονοποιός, ἀνάγκη μιμῆσθαι τριῶν ὄντων τὸν ἀριθμὸν ἔν τι αἰεὶ, ἢ γὰρ οἷα ἦν ἢ ἔστιν, ἢ οἷα φασὶν καὶ δοκεῖ, ἢ οἷα εἶναι δεῖ, *Poet.* 25.1460b8–11. The relative adj. οἷος, 'such as' ('kinds of' in my translation), covers universals as defined at *Poet.* 9.1451b8–9 (where ποῖος, 'of what kind', matches οἷος in ch. 25). What 'people say and think' is an open-ended category, but Rostagni (1945: 154) is wrong to identify it with probability (εἰκός); 25.1460b35–61a1 confirms that it includes mythologico-religious beliefs (see 214–15 below); *Soph. el.* 24.179a29 applies similar phrasing to certain ways of reasoning, [Arist.] *Mag. Mor.* 1.33, 1193b6 to ethical convictions. Ch. 25's tripartition resembles, but is not the same as, ch. 2's genre-relative schema of characters 'like us' (~ known reality), 'better than us' (~ idealization), and 'worse than us': the last has only a loose connection to what 'people say and think'.

⁷ For the relationship of ch. 25 to Plato's *Ion*, cf. Ch. 4, 166–79. For the relevance to Protagoras, see *Poet.* 19.1456b13–19 (with the verbal-cum-methodological connection between 1456b18–19, ὡς ἄλλης καὶ οὐ τῆς ποιητικῆς, and 1460b13–15), though note *Int.* 4.17a1–7 for the relevance of linguistics to poetics.

Aristotle himself takes politics/ethics to be a 'master art' which determines the values of all other domains of human practice.

The critical principles advocated in chapter 25 appear at a rather late juncture in the argument of the *Poetics*; they seem to stand as something of an adjunct to its main progression of thought. By this stage Aristotle has completed his analysis of tragedy and is rounding off his treatment of epic; only the *sunkrisis* between these two genres—the comparative verdict on which of them is inherently 'superior'—remains for the work's final (surviving) section. But the opening of chapter 25 has a firmness of theoretical stance whose implications extend beyond the prima-facie concern with interpretative cavils such as those Aristotle goes on to rebut. A case can be made, indeed, for regarding the whole chapter, despite the bitty and contentious surface of the argument, as condensing Aristotle's conception of some of the key values of poetry. At first glance, it seems that he predicates those values of a culturally specialized activity (an 'art', *technê*) with a self-sufficient status: unconstrained in its representational-cum-imaginative scope (stretching from the realistic to the idealistic), in its linguistic inventiveness (its 'literariness', as a modern formalist would put it), and, last but not least, in its independence from the strict demands of politics, ethics, or any specific domain of technical expertise.

On closer inspection, however, things are not so straightforward. With poetic language and style (*lexis*), chapter 22 of the *Poetics* shows that unlike formalist proponents of a concept of 'literariness'—the foregrounding of linguistically marked features which have an effect of 'estrangement' or 'defamiliarization' *vis-à-vis* ordinary, non-literary discourse—Aristotle imposes limits on what he counts as 'strange' or 'alien' (*xenikos*) usage. When Victor Shklovsky invoked Aristotle as foreshadowing his own formalist theory of estrangement ('According to Aristotle, poetic language ought to have the character of something foreign'), he ignored the fact that the *Poetics* offsets this point against the need for 'clarity' of style.⁸ That balance of considerations reflects Aristotle's conviction that poetry cannot afford to abandon either communicative or cognitive lucidity: clarity and intelligibility remain, for him, an indispensable virtue of all poetic style. This point is underlined near the end of chapter 22, where a gift for

⁸ Shklovsky 1990: 12. See esp. *Poet.* 22.1458a18–26 for limits on the linguistically 'foreign', ξενικόν. Cf. *Rh.* 3.1, 1404b1–37.

metaphor is identified as the most important element of poetic creativity ('the only thing one cannot acquire from someone else') on the grounds that good metaphors involve a capacity to observe and focus on likenesses ($\tau\omicron\delta\ \tau\omicron\ \delta\dot{\iota}\muοιον\ \theta\epsilon\omega\rho\epsilon\acute{\iota}\nu$), something we know that Aristotle also counted as a philosophical activity of mind.⁹ While this leaves room for seeing things that others have not seen, it also holds poetic language to the test of a kind of transparency of sense. Unsympathetic, therefore, to difficult involutions of meaning (one would not expect him to have been especially fond, for example, of Pindar), Aristotle does not conceive of the permutations of style as distancing poetry from the recognizable contours of experience in the world of its hearers or readers.¹⁰

Equivalent qualifications apply also to the other two premises advanced near the start of *Poetics* 25, namely the wide spectrum of possibilities legitimately open to poetic mimesis and the difference between standards of 'correctness' in poetry and in politics (or in any other sphere of expert activity). As regards the scope of mimesis, it is notable that Aristotle does not in fact show himself hospitable to imaginative liberty or fantasy for its own sake. To that extent (but that extent only), a Romantic like August Wilhelm Schlegel had some basis for his view that Aristotle privileged 'understanding' (*Verstand*) over 'imagination' (*Einbildungskraft*).¹¹ Both the second and the third of chapter 25's reference points for mimetic representation (what 'people say and think' and what 'ought to be the case') are contrasted with what is 'true' in the sense of actually the case (1460b33–6), but neither is wholly independent of what Aristotle would count as the structures of reality. This is obvious enough with 'the kinds of things

⁹ See the remarks on metaphor at 22.1459a5–8. For the wider Aristotelian significance of perceiving 'likenesses', cf. Kirby 1997: esp. 534–7, Halliwell 2002a: 189–91.

¹⁰ Aristotle's impatience with poetic obscurity and emptiness is indirectly betrayed by his sneer at certain Platonizing locutions (about metaphysical forms) as 'empty talk and poetic metaphor', $\kappa\epsilon\nu\omicron\lambda\omicron\gamma\epsilon\acute{\iota}\nu\ \dots\ \kappa\alpha\acute{\iota}\ \mu\epsilon\tau\alpha\phi\omicron\rho\acute{\alpha}\varsigma\ \lambda\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\epsilon\iota\nu\ \pi\omicron\iota\eta\tau\iota\kappa\acute{\alpha}\varsigma$ (*Metaph.* 1.9, 991a21–2, 13.5, 1079b26). Aristotle's only certain reference to Pindar is at *Rh.* 2.24, 1401a17–19. Silk (2005: 5) thinks Aristotle's requirement of clarity both 'doctrinaire' and an extrapolation from the virtues of prose.

¹¹ Schlegel (1967: 14), in the 17th of his 1808 Vienna lectures on dramatic art and literature. On the importance for Aristotle's position of 'imagination' qua intensity of engagement with the hypothetical world of drama, see Halliwell (2003b: 60–5). Zoran (1998: 146–7) imposes too narrow a restriction on the imaginative dimension of Aristotle's conception of poetry.

that ought to be the case' (*οἷα εἶναι δεῖ*), whose normative force, holding above all in the realm of the ethical, is a matter of idealization not free invention. Aristotle himself appeals to it when describing the characters of tragedy and epic as (generically) 'better than us' (e.g. 2.1448a11–18), and it presupposes a capacity on the part of poetry's audiences to grasp intuitively the relationship of the ideal to the actual.

'The kinds of things people say and think' (*οἷα φασιν καὶ δοκεῖ*) is a formulation with, admittedly, more equivocal implications. It denotes an open-ended category which includes beliefs that Aristotle himself would take to be false. Indeed, it must in general contain beliefs which cannot easily be shown to be true, if the distinction from 'things which were or are the case' is to make any sense. Here belong such small-scale details as the examples, taken from visual art, of the horse's (supposedly) incorrect leg movements at 25.1460b18–19 or the erroneous depiction of a doe with horns (1460b31–2). Presumably such mistakes corresponded to relatively common beliefs; at any rate, many people would not *perceive* them as mistakes. Even in such cases, however, Aristotle is not arguing that incorrect details are simply irrelevant to artistic or aesthetic values: they are part of the works in question and need justification. The position of a horse's legs might be deliberately chosen by the artist as a feature of, say, a gripping battle scene; and the doe's horns, despite their biological impossibility, might likewise contribute to, or detract from, the vividness of its depiction in a hunting scene.¹² Such details, however, would be not only biological but also artistic or aesthetic faults if they did not serve some mimetic purpose—if they were depicted 'unmimetically' (*ἀμυμῆτως*), as Aristotle puts it, i.e. without mimetic conviction.¹³ The use of that adverb (unique in the *Poetics*), in a context where an 'impossibility' (the doe's horns) is at issue, emphasizes the larger point that the scope and value of mimesis are not limited to the strictly veridical.

The nature of what is at stake in appealing to 'the kinds of things people say and think' stands out more starkly when Aristotle

¹² Aristotle uses the verb *προαιρεῖσθαι* at 25.1460b17–18 for the artist's conception of his aims: for necessary emendation of the syntax see Vahlen (1885: 258–9). This connects the horse example (and, indirectly, that of the doe) with the statement about 'plausible impossibilities' at 24.1460a26–7: see n. 17 below.

¹³ 1460b32: for later uses of *ἀμυμῆτος* see Halliwell 2002a: 304 with n. 44, Nünlist 2009: 94–5.

illustrates the principle with reference to popular religious beliefs about the gods. Despite their falsity (as he sees it: 1460b36), and in direct contradiction of Xenophanes' critique of Homer and Hesiod, Aristotle justifies a place for such beliefs in poetry.¹⁴ But even this major concession is not intended to licence an arbitrary freedom of perspective on the part of poets (or, equally, of critics). A counterbalancing pair of Aristotelian assumptions needs spelling out here. One is that even popular religious beliefs possess a *raison d'être* which is at least to some degree aligned, in both explanatory and moral terms, with intelligible conceptions of reality. A case which illuminates this point is the statement in the *Rhetoric* that because indignation at undeserved prosperity is ethically right, 'we ascribe it also to the gods'¹⁵—a formulation whose first-person plural intimates not that Aristotle himself shares such beliefs, but that he has a view of how they operate psychologically and culturally and therefore how they might be made to inform a poetically valid representation of the world.

The second assumption, however, refines and tempers the first within the context of the *Poetics* itself. It is the principle that everything used by a poet, including traditional religious beliefs, must avoid or minimize 'irrationality' (τὸ ἄλογον). When Aristotle sanctions recourse to direct divine intervention in a tragic (or epic) narrative, he does so reluctantly and with the caveat that such things should be confined to affairs 'outside the play' proper, i.e. outside the main dramatic framework of the plot, which, as he repeatedly insists, should satisfy the criteria of probability/plausibility and necessity.¹⁶ 'The kind of things people say and think' is a liberal reference point which opens up poetry's mimetic universe to many possible configurations of action and experience. But it provides no exemption for poets from the need to keep their works accountable at a consistent level of human understanding. If Aristotle is anxious to avoid a

¹⁴ 1460b35–61a1: cf. nn. 6 above, 31 below; contrast Plato's and Isocrates' echoes of Xenophanes' critique, Ch. 6 n. 50. On Aristotle's attitudes to popular religion, and the place of the gods in his theory of tragedy, see Halliwell 1998a: 230–3. Note the view of Antisthenes fr. 58 Declava Caizzi (=SSR VA 194) that Homer mixed truth with 'belief, *doxa*'; cf. Richardson 1975: 78. Similarly Zeno of Citium, *apud* Dio Chrys. 53.4 (=SVF i. 274).

¹⁵ *Rh.* 2.9, 1386b15–16. Cf. *Poet.* 15.1454b5–6 ('we ascribe to the gods the capacity to see all things') for a similarly adoptive use of the first-personal plural.

¹⁶ See 15.1454a37–b6 for the marginalization of divine interventions.

critical straitjacket of moralistic or rationalistic rigidity, he has no wish to uncouple mimesis from the function, stated in chapter 9, of representing 'what *could* happen and is possible in terms of probability or necessity'.¹⁷ Some later Greek theorists may consciously have tried to move beyond the parameters of *Poetics* 25 in this respect.¹⁸

The balance of considerations I have identified behind Aristotle's view of poetic language and the depictive scope of mimesis can be extended to his statement (211 above) that 'poetry's standard of correctness is not the same as that of politics or of any other technical expertise'. To say that the standards of poetic value are 'not the same as' is not to say that they are divorced from, or can simply override, those of politics or ethics (or even those of medicine, biology, or other specific domains of action and thought).¹⁹ That Aristotle's position here does not amount to a statement of poetic autonomy, as is often claimed, can be clearly seen later in the chapter when he ties together the threads of his argument. After laying out his typology of solutions to poetic problems, he summarizes the thrust of his case by saying: 'but criticism both of irrationality [i.e. narrative or dramatic breaches of sense or coherence] and of depravity [i.e. the representation of

¹⁷ οἷα ἂν γένοιτο καὶ τὰ δυνατὰ κατὰ τὸ εἰκὸς ἢ τὸ ἀναγκαῖον, 9.1451a37. This principle carries more weight than the preference for 'plausible impossibilities' over 'implausible possibilities' at 24.1460a26–7. The latter is hyperbole: no strict impossibility, perceived as such, could be genuinely 'plausible' (think of the explicit impossibilities expressed in riddles: 22.1458a27). The licencing of 'impossibilities' is a sign of tension in Aristotle's attempt to calibrate the logic of fictional worlds; paraphrase often smooths out the difficulties, e.g. Wood 2009: 179–80. 25.1460b23–9 (where military absurdity not logical or physical impossibility is at issue: cf. 229–30 below) shows Aristotle somewhat uncomfortable about just how far to countenance impossibilities. Cf. nn. 12 above, 21 below.

¹⁸ For a later poetic spectrum extending from truth to unlimited fantasy, see Σ^{bT} on Hom. *Il.* 14.342–51, with Halliwell (2002a) 305–7; cf. Ch. 7 n. 45. Another tripartition ('true', 'false', and 'as if true') is ascribed to Asclepiades of Myrlea at Sext. *Emp. Math.* 1.252–3, and a related tripartition (history, myth, realistic 'fictions': *ἱστορία, μῦθος, πλάσματα*) occurs *ibid.* 263–4: on the relationship between these passages, as well as later sources using comparable terminology, see various views in Meijering 1987: 76–87, Rispoli 1988: esp. 21–7, 170–204, Nesselrath 1990: 151–5, Blank 1998: 266–70, 277–8; cf. Walbank 1985: 233–6.

¹⁹ Nightingale 2006: 40 ('literature . . . is separate from . . . ethics and politics') is one of many who translate Aristotle's statement into a complete demarcation, though she then equivocates ('does not . . . posit a "pure" aesthetic sphere'). Cf. [Arist.] *Mag. Mor.* 1.19, 1190a30–2, using painting to draw a distinction between 'internal' standards of mimetic depiction and the overriding ethical values to which painting, like everything else, remains subject.

human evil] is correct when these things are unnecessary and serve no purpose'.²⁰ The adjective 'correct' in this sentence corresponds to the noun translated above as 'standard of correctness'. That is to say, Aristotle concludes this section by conceding (as, in fact, he had also done earlier in the chapter²¹) that 'external' criteria of rationality and goodness do have a purchase on poetic mimesis, but in a way which adjusts them to the 'internal' priorities which he takes to define poetry's own ends.

One other passage from chapter 25 merits close attention in this connection. This is where Aristotle makes his most explicit pronouncement on how ethical considerations should enter into judgement of poetry. He says:

when the issue is whether or not someone [i.e. in poetry] has spoken or acted well, one should examine not only whether the actual deed or utterance is good or bad, but also the identity of the agent or speaker, to whom he acted or spoke, when, with what means, and for what end—namely, whether to occasion greater good, or avert greater evil.²²

This statement constitutes the basis for a sensitive contextualism. It is evident that, at the very least, Aristotle is saying that actions depicted or words used in poetry cannot be judged without reckoning fully with all the relevant circumstances and aspects of what is said or done. But does this amount to a form of 'aesthetic' or ethical contextualism?²³

Now it is clearly the case that, for Aristotle, ethical judgement must always take account of the identity of the agent, the circumstances,

²⁰ ὀρθὴ δ' ἐπιτίμησις καὶ ἀλογία καὶ μοχθηρία, ὅταν μὴ ἀνάγκης οὐσης μὴτ' ἐν χρήσῃται τῷ ἀλόγῳ...: 25.1461b19–20.

²¹ See 25.1460b23–9 (with n. 17 above): 'impossibilities' (strictly speaking an extreme form of 'irrationality', τὸ ἄλογον) and other contraventions of external standards of correctness are poetic faults if not internally justified; they should in principle be avoided.

²² περὶ δὲ τοῦ καλῶς ἢ μὴ καλῶς εἰ εἴρηται τι καὶ ἢ πέπρακται, οὐ μόνον σκεπτόμενος εἰς αὐτὸ τὸ πεπραγμένον ἢ εἰρημένον βλέποντα εἰ σπουδαῖον ἢ φαῦλον, ἀλλὰ καὶ εἰς τὸν πράττοντα ἢ λέγοντα πρὸς ὃν ἢ ὅτε ἢ ὅτω ἢ οὐ ἔνεκεν, οἷον εἰ μείζονος ἀγαθοῦ, ἵνα γένηται, ἢ μείζονος κακοῦ, ἵνα ἀπογένηται: 25.1461a4–9.

²³ The question is posed, but regarded as unanswerable, by Dupont-Roc and Lallot 1980: 393–4; many other commentators fail to see that the question needs asking. Rostagni (1945: 160, cf. 155–6) rightly denies that Aristotle's principles are 'purely aesthetic' but misleadingly suggests he is in effect deriving aesthetic from ethical judgement. More nuanced is Schmitt 2008: 715. Pace Lanza 1987: 213 n. 8, *Poet.* 25.1461a4–9 cannot be simply equated with the conditions for coherence of character in ch. 15.

the aim of the action, etc. We find him expressly invoking such variables in his own ethical writings. When specifying, for instance, in book 3 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the factors which can make an action 'involuntary' (and therefore sometimes deserving of pity: in itself a point highly germane to the *Poetics*), he lists all the possible objects of a person's ignorance: 'who he is, what he is doing, what or whom he is acting on, what instrument he is using, and to what end' (1111a3–5). Although in this passage Aristotle is speaking of an agent's own knowledge or ignorance, the close match between the set of terms used here and those adduced in *Poetics* 25 shows that in the latter he is thinking with, so to speak, a template of reasoning which he has carried over from his ethical philosophy in general.²⁴

Yet in the parallel passage of the *Poetics* Aristotle cannot simply be stressing the variables which need to be taken into account for scrupulous, context-sensitive ethical judgement. If he were, his statement would be beside the point, since the purpose of chapter 25 is to expound a group of hermeneutic principles which are correctly aligned with poetry's proper function and which can be used to defend poetry against various kinds of inappropriate criticism and fault-finding. If Aristotle were saying only, in effect, 'before making an ethical judgement of an action or utterance in poetry, be sure that you take into account all the considerations relevant to the judgement', his principle would be superfluous: it would be patently applicable to all and every ethical judgement.²⁵ And, more importantly, it would offer no support at all to his larger thesis that poetry's standards are 'not the same' as those of ethics or politics.

I believe, then, that we are obliged to take *Poetics* 1461a4–9 to be the formulation of a principle of artistic or aesthetic contextualism: Aristotle is referring to judgements of whether or not the depiction of an action or utterance is right for its particular place in the economy of the poem. To that extent we should understand the adverb *καλῶς* ('whether or not someone has spoken or acted *well*') to be correlated with poetry's own 'standard of correctness'.²⁶ Yet it remains the case that Aristotle chooses a formulation whose terms have inescapably

²⁴ The same template is applied to other points of ethical judgement at e.g. *Eth. Nic.* 2.3, 1104b22–3 (reactions to pleasures and pains), 2.6, 1106b21–2 (feeling the emotions appropriately).

²⁵ This invalidates the understanding of the passage in Golden and Hardison 1968: 276.

²⁶ Lucas 1968: 240, *ad* 1461a4, gets halfway to this interpretation.

ethical resonance and implications. In maintaining (perhaps with certain Platonic arguments in his sights) that individual actions or utterances must be judged as integral elements of a poem's whole fabric of action and character, he is making a point which reinforces the larger thesis of *Poetics* 25 that poetry (or any other artform) has its own standards of value. He is also indicating, however, that those values are not self-contained but necessarily exist—given the mimetic depiction of 'action and life' (*Poet.* 6.1450a16–17)²⁷—in a dialectical relationship with the life-values of ethics. So to make contextually sensitive judgements of actions and utterances in poetry will *look very like*, and indeed be a modified form of, making contextualized ethical judgements of life—with the critical difference that the former will not lose sight of the specific poetic setting (the narrative or dramatic design of the particular work) in which actions and utterances are embedded. Poetic contextualism will have a double frame of reference which ethical contextualism lacks.²⁸

Aristotle's position in *Poetics* 25 rests, then, on a nuanced view of the relationship between poetics and ethics. He implicitly refuses what might be thought of as opposite critical fundamentalisms, both of them available to Greek minds from the archaic period onwards and both of them persistent options in the history of criticism ever since (and the history of aesthetics more generally): the one an insistence on exclusive standards of veracity and morality, the other an assertion of pure poetic autonomy. But is the resulting Aristotelian stance a paradigm of judicious balance or just a compromise designed to cope with intractable problems about the value of poetry in Greek culture? Has Aristotle really solved the biggest critical 'problem' of all, or merely devised a means of holding it at bay?

Those questions steer us towards a larger task, that of attempting to work out what Aristotle understands the psychological conditions of poetic experience to be. This is a task which requires tactful handling of relatively limited evidence. The *Poetics*' canonization in sixteenth-century Italy has burdened the treatise with a history—first as neo-classical gospel, later as the target of Romantic and post-Romantic

²⁷ I prefer the reading of MS A, *πράξεως καὶ βίου*, to that of MS B, *πράξεων καὶ βίου*, adopted by Kassel 1965: 11.

²⁸ Cf. Halliwell (2002: 171–6) for a fuller account of Aristotle's 'dual-aspect' theory of mimesis. Alter (1984: 3–21) is one modern critic who retains a concept of mimesis as a counterweight to (post-)structuralist conceptions of literature as 'closed-circuit poesis' (11).

iconoclasm—whose overfamiliarity makes it hard now for anyone to be unselfconsciously Aristotelian any longer, but which equally has left lingering traces, if often at a subconscious level, in many areas of literary theory and criticism. The challenge of making sense of the *Poetics*' theoretical axioms without succumbing to the temptations of either idolization or iconoclasm is best served by accepting that many of its ideas and arguments are hints and pointers, not fully elaborated theses. Aristotle's writings in general are a record of his mind in the process of thinking: sifting material, drawing distinctions, accumulating a viable terminology, identifying key issues, finding both the merits and the shortcomings of existing views on the subject. The voice of the *Poetics* is, for sure, that of someone with a 'theory' of poetry, but a theory which does not lay claim to be exhaustive or definitive on every point. All dogmatic readings of the work, whether *pro* or *contra*, should be regarded as suspect.

Since the *Poetics* has often been unfairly accused of its own dogmatism, it is worth glancing one last time at chapter 25 for an illustration of a typically Aristotelian 'tone of voice' and, with it, a clue to how we might tease out some of the work's underlying assumptions. On a matter as large and contentious as the charge that certain things in poetry are 'not true', Aristotle suggests, in the first place, that perhaps such things can be resolved by reference to normative standards of 'what ought to be the case'—'just as Sophocles claimed that *he* created characters who are the sort of people they ought to be, while Euripides, he said, created the sort who really exist' (a tantalizing echo of a Sophoclean contribution to the kind of debate held, and travestied, in Aristophanes' *Frogs*).²⁹ Here, then, Aristotle appears to be defending poetic idealism against a possible appeal to standards of realism. Yet he follows this with what might have struck some of his hearers as the startlingly relaxed statement that even a charge of theological falsehood against poetry might be deflected by reference to 'what people say': 'perhaps it is neither ideal nor true [for poets] to say such things, and maybe it is as Xenophanes thought [i.e. that the poets have systematically falsified the nature of the gods]; no matter, people do say them' (and therefore poets can make use of

²⁹ *Poet.* 25.1460b32–4 = *Soph.* T53a *TrGF*. On related issues in *Frogs*, see Ch. 3, esp. 120–8.

them).³⁰ Xenophanes, who can certainly rank as a kind of critical fundamentalist, would presumably have counted this solution as no solution at all, only a way of *compounding* the problem.³¹ But Aristotle, with a characteristic gesture of tentativeness and circumspection (the passage makes repeated use of ‘perhaps’ or ‘no doubt’, ἵσως), wants to keep his options open. Here, then, we get an important glimpse of Aristotle as a critical pluralist, even a *theorist* of critical pluralism. Yet, as I have already stressed, his refusal to impose a straitjacket of truth or morality on (judgements of) poetry does not make him wish to eliminate those criteria from his terms of reference, since truth and morality are things that human beings use, however imperfectly, to give sense and structure to their lives.

To emphasize, as many have done, the prescriptive mode of presentation in the *Poetics*—the repeated statements, from the first sentence onwards, of what one ‘should’ or ‘must’ expect of poetry—without keeping in view the telling indications of pragmatic flexibility, is to force the treatise into a mould which it does not properly fit. Aristotle may believe, though in a sense which is itself somewhat elusive, that poetry ‘speaks more of universals’ (μᾶλλον τὰ καθόλου . . . λέγει) than does history (9.1451b6–7), but he remains aware that the principles of judgement, in poetics as elsewhere, need to be tested on particular cases. So when he talks of ‘perhaps’ appealing to norms or ideals when judging poetic treatment of heroes or gods, but equally of ‘perhaps’ finding justification in what people say and think (in the conglomerate of the culture’s beliefs and images), this does not represent an unstable indecisiveness in his theory. It conveys, rather, a strong sense that everything will depend on the details of individual passages within the larger context of their poems. Even so, chapter 25 itself makes clear that whatever the particulars involved—the meanings of words, the depiction of characters and actions, the plotting of a scene—a final criterion does exist: the achievement of poetry’s own purpose or end, its *telos* (1460b24). For this Aristotle refers his hearers back to what has gone before. But what exactly has the *Poetics* told us is poetry’s own purpose? And where are we to locate the *Poetics* on the map of Greek ideas of poetic value, not least in relation

³⁰ ἵσως γὰρ οὐτε βέλτιον οὕτω λέγειν οὐτ’ ἀληθῆ, ἀλλ’ εἰ ἔτυχεν ὥσπερ Ξενοφάνει· ἀλλ’ οὖν φασι: 25.1460b36–61a1.

³¹ See Xenophanes B1.21–4, 11–12, 14–16 DK for his attitudes to poetic ‘theology’; discussion in Babut 1974, Cerri 2007: 39–46.

to the zones of experience designated in this book by the vocabulary of 'ecstasy' and 'truth'?

It is orthodoxy to say that Aristotle identifies the goal of poetry as pleasure. This answer is not wrong but insufficient. On Aristotle's own terms as well as ours, that answer calls for further specification: what kind(s) of pleasure fulfil the function of poetry?³² The *Poetics* itself links such a specification (in part) to genre. To follow the grain of Aristotle's arguments it helps to narrow the focus accordingly, and from here onwards I shall restrict most of my remarks to the *telos*, and therefore implicitly the value, of the genre which receives most attention in the *Poetics*, tragedy. Towards the end of chapter 13 Aristotle criticizes tragedies which end with a sort of poetic justice (i.e. 'opposite outcomes for the good and the bad', 1453a32–3) on the grounds that they offer a pleasure more suitable for comedy than for tragedy. In the following chapter he defines the appropriate or proper pleasure of tragedy as 'the pleasure arising from pity and fear through mimesis' (1453b12).³³ In a sense, that definition might seem to settle the matter once and for all. But a close, probing reader of the *Poetics* may not be wholly convinced that it does so.

There are at least two pressing reasons for wanting to know more. For one thing, Aristotle's formal definition of tragedy at the start of chapter 6 does not itself specify pleasure as the goal of the genre, though it incorporates a reference to the pleasure provided by tragedy's poeticized language.³⁴ On the contrary, it seems to specify catharsis—arguably now the most famous/notorious, as well as enigmatic, concept in the entire history of Western poetics—as the goal of tragedy. I shall return to catharsis later in my argument, to consider (among other things) its relationship to pleasure. But there is a second, independent reason for wanting fuller explanation of Aristotle's position on tragic pleasure. That phrase 'the pleasure arising from pity and fear through mimesis' itself hints at more than it declares: it converts emotions whose intentional object is something

³² For contrasting approaches to Aristotle's views on tragic/poetic pleasure, see Heath 2001, Halliwell 1998a: 62–81, 2002a: 177–206.

³³ See 250–3 with n. 97 below.

³⁴ *Poet.* 6.1449b25, ἡδυσμένῳ λόγῳ, literally 'discourse/language made pleasurable', i.e. rhythmically and (in parts) lyrically heightened above ordinary speech, as 1449b28–31 explains. Aristotle clearly counts this as a basic pleasure of tragic poetry, but not one which defines its key properties as a genre. Cf. 212–13 above on Aristotle's conception of poetic language more generally.

negative (i.e. human sufferings) into the basis for pleasure, and it ties that conversion to the workings of mimesis. Even if we suppose, as I think we must, that part of what the phrase implies is that emotions which are normally painful in life (both pity and fear are defined in the *Rhetoric* in terms of psychological 'pain') get transmuted by the processes of artistic representation and expression into a (complex) source of pleasure, Aristotle's words do not spell out how or why that should be so. But is this because he is withholding an explanation or taking one for granted—or even, dare one think, because he does not actually have one?

If we try to follow the thread of what Aristotle assumes about the emotional-cum-pleasurable experience of tragedy, the relationship between what is stated in the *Poetics* and what is left unstated, or perhaps taken for granted, is one which lurks persistently in our field of vision. Consider, to begin with, the pregnant passage from chapter 6 where Aristotle argues for the primacy of plot, *qua* 'representation of action', over character(ization) in tragedy. In addition to other reasons he has already given, he states that the most important means by which tragedy creates intense emotional excitement (*ψυχαγωγείν*, literally 'draws (out) the soul') are elements of the plot, namely instances of 'reversal' (*peripeteia*) and 'recognition' (*anagnôrisis*, 1450a33–5). Over and above the fact that he is clearly counting on a pre-existing understanding of the dramatic meaning of *peripeteia* and *anagnôrisis*, terms used here for the first time in the treatise (and which he will not explain as constituents of what he calls the 'complex' plot-type until chapters 10–11), Aristotle gives striking emphasis to his claim about the emotional potency of plot components by employing the verb *ψυχαγωγείν*. I have glossed this above in terms of emotional excitement. Its original signification, we know, was that of a necromantic 'conjuring of souls', like the episode (though not the word itself) in *Odyssey* 11 where on Circe's instructions Odysseus induces the ghosts of the underworld, through ritual blood sacrifice and other offerings, to show themselves to him.

Before asking what Aristotle's use of this term reveals, it is worth drawing attention to an example here of the sometimes subtle and unobtrusive architecture of reasoning in the *Poetics*. The passage in chapter 6 quoted above contains the implicit justification for Aristotle's later assertion, in chapter 13, that the best tragic plot construction should be 'complex' not 'single' or 'simple', i.e. should contain reversal and recognition. Without chapter 6's claim that these plot

components mediate the most emotionally powerful impact available to tragedy, that premise in chapter 13 would have no basis in the text. So what will turn out to be Aristotle's advocacy of the complex plot-type rests not on a liking for intricacy or multiplicity of dramatic action *per se* but on a perception of how the emotions of pity and fear can be aroused in the most intense, concentrated form. And Aristotle chooses to mark that intensity with a word which, at this date, was still a forceful metaphor from necromancy.³⁵

Developing from their original meaning of conjuring or raising the souls of the dead, the verb *psuchagôgein* and its cognates had by the classical period come to possess the figurative sense of powerfully stirring and controlling the minds of audiences of poetry and rhetoric. One passage which intriguingly seems to straddle literal and metaphorical usage is Aeschylus, *Persae* 687, where Darius' ghost describes the lamentations of the chorus of Persian elders as summoning him from the grave *ψυχαγωγοῖς* . . . γόοις, 'with soul-raising grief', and in a pitiful manner (*οἰκτρῶς*, 688). The situation Darius describes blurs the distinction between ritual necromancy and emotional plangency. The Persian laments achieve their aim of summoning the dead king's ghost, but they have at the same time an emotionally penetrating quality which, by implication, might rouse deep pity in living hearers too (an implication pertinent to the audience's own experience of the scene).³⁶ There is a shift here, in other words, from a conception of *psuchagôgia* as quasi-physically calling up the souls of the dead to one of affectively drawing out and 'transporting' the souls of the living.

Although we cannot reconstruct the long-term semantic development in detail, it is clear that at any rate by the early fourth century the vocabulary of *psuchagôgia* could be applied to various kinds of

³⁵ I see no reason to follow Lanata (1963: 194) in taking Aristotle's usage of *ψυχαγωγεῖν* to be a faded metaphor ('piuttosto scolorita'). For the general strength of the metaphor in classical texts, cf. Taylor 1928: 510–11 (commenting on Pl. *Tim.* 71a, where *ψυχαγωγεῖν* refers to the power of dreams and fantasies over the appetitive part of the soul).

³⁶ See Broadhead 1960: 305–9. Cf. Ch. 3, 125 with n. 55 there, for the interpretation of Dionysus' pleasure at Ar. *Frogs* 1028–9 in response to this scene of *Persians*. Pace O'Sullivan 1992: 72, 114–15, *psuchagôgia* need not count as more 'Aeschylean' than 'Euripidean' by the criteria of *Frogs*, especially given the strong association between Euripides and pity (Ch. 3 n. 60, with Arist. *Poet.* 13.1453a28–30).

communicative enthrallment.³⁷ In that respect, we are dealing with an extension of an older Greek tradition which turned the practices of witchcraft, magic, and the like into metaphors for the psychically transformative power of music, poetry, and rhetoric.³⁸ Isocrates speaks of poetry 'transporting the souls' (*ψυχαγωγεῖν*) of its hearers by its sheer rhythms and verbal patterns, (even) independently of its meaning—a sort of incantatory mesmerism, it seems. He also refers in particular to Homer and the tragic poets as having shown how to use myths of action and conflict to grip mass audiences in this way, though without, he insists, thereby improving or edifying them in any way. In both these passages, Isocrates identifies the heart of this psychagogic effect with a spellbinding, hypnotic power (of rhythms, words, images) that overrides cognitive or moral judgement: audiences are swayed involuntarily by such verbal artistry in a manner parallel to the necromancer's compulsion of souls to do his bidding.³⁹ In Plato's *Phaedrus*, Socrates at one point puts into the mouth of an imagined critic of rhetoric the seemingly sceptical suggestion that rhetoric is a means of 'transporting souls through words' (*ψυχαγωγία τις διὰ λόγων*, 261a). But later on he appeals to this same idea ('Since the power of language/reason (*logos*) is *psuchagōgia*') to support the thesis that an authentically philosophical rhetoric must include an understanding of all the varieties which 'soul' or 'mind' (*psuchê*) can take.⁴⁰ Between them these passages create the somewhat ambiguous impression that *psuchagōgia* is sometimes a dangerous manipulator

³⁷ The joke about Socrates as pseudo-necromancer at Ar. *Birds* 1553–64 perhaps plays on the extended sense of *psuchagōg-* terms: the philosopher is a sort of word-sorcerer who manipulates others' souls/minds; see Dunbar (1995: 711–12), and cf. Ch. 4, 199 n. 95, 206, for Platonic imagery of Socrates as bewitcher *vel sim*. It has often been thought that Gorgias employed a concept of aesthetic *psuchagōgia*: e.g. Süß 1910: 77–9, Pohlenz 1965: ii. 454, 463, Chandler 2006: 148. This is plausible but not directly attested.

³⁸ See Ch. 2, 47–52 with n. 17, for the Homeric vocabulary of bewitchment (*θέλγειν*, *κηληθμός*); Ch. 4, 185–203, on 'incantations'; Ch. 6, 267, 274, for magic, incantations, and drugs (*γοητεία*, *θέλγειν*, *ἐπαδαί*) in Gorgias.

³⁹ Isoc. 2.48–9, 9.10–11: see Ch. 6, 291–5. Cf. [Pl.] *Minos* 321a for the description of tragedy as the 'most spellbinding' (*ψυχαγωγικώτατον*) of genres, with Timocles fr. 6.6 (nn. 79, 92 below, with Ch. 1, 8–9) for the tragic spectator 'spellbound by the suffering of others' (*πρὸς ἀλλοτρίῳ τε ψυχαγωγηθεὶς πάθει*). Cf. the semantically kindred phrase *ἔλκει τὴν ψυχὴν*, 'pulls the soul', in Socrates' description of the magnetic chain of inspiration at Pl. *Ion* 536a.

⁴⁰ *Phdr.* 271c–d; see Asmis (1986) for full discussion. For the psychagogic power of rhetoric, cf. Aeschin. 2.4, Lycurg. 1.33. *Psuchagōgia* as persuasion of people against their better judgement is used of real-life contexts at e.g. Dem. 44.63, [Dem.] 59.55.

of irrationality, but that it could ideally be made into a branch of philosophy by being grounded in true knowledge of the workings of the mind. Finally, a passage in Xenophon's *Memorabilia* where Socrates describes the sculptor Cleiton's ability to produce 'the appearance of life' or 'the illusion of animation' (τὸ ζωτικὸν φαίνεσθαι) as the feature of his sculptures which most moves and arouses (ψυχαγωγεῖν) their viewers, shows that the trope of *psuchagôgia* was available for visually as well as verbally enticing effects on the mind.⁴¹

In the *Poetics*, as we have seen, Aristotle describes the components of the 'complex' plot as the most psychagogically powerful means at tragedy's disposal. But near the end of chapter 6 he also applies the cognate adjective, *ψυχαγωγικόν*, to the possible impact of visual presentation (*opsis*) in the tragic theatre. When making that last point, he separates the organization of this aspect of tragic performance from the art of the poet himself. This is not the place to reconsider the notorious issue of Aristotle's relationship to theatrical performance and its visibility.⁴² What is important for my present argument is that Aristotle does not deny the emotional efficacy of the visual dimension of theatre: he indicates at the start of chapter 14 (1453b1–2) that pity and fear can be produced by *opsis*, and in the final chapter (26.1462a15–18) he will stress the power of (by implication, properly designed) visual presentation. But he does use the idea of visibility, qua theatrical resource in its own right, as foil to his own theoretical principle that the most direct experience of tragic emotions can and should be generated by the 'action' itself, i.e. by the dramatically shaped structure of events.

What is most striking about the comment on *peripeteia* and *anagnôrisis* as the most psychagogic elements of tragedy at 6.1450a33–5 is that it simultaneously answers to an established cultural perception of the genre's emotional force, its soul-stirring arousal of 'pity and

⁴¹ Xen. *Mem.* 3.10.6: on the context of this passage, see Halliwell 2002a: 122–4. For post-classical usage of *ψυχαγωγία*, see Ch. 6, 324 with n. 155.

⁴² For a comparative perspective on the question and an attempt to correct narrow verdicts on this aspect of Aristotle's thinking, see Halliwell (2003b); Scott (1999) makes a different case for the importance of performance to Aristotle's theory. Dupont (2007: esp. 25–77) is a flamboyant assault on Aristotle as supposedly anti-theatrical. Porter (2008: 287–302) makes an exaggerated case for Aristotle's 'hostility to . . . the sensuous dimensions of art and poetry', including his supposed desire to 'suppress' staging (300).

fear', but also prefigures the as yet unexplained kernel of Aristotle's own theory of the ideal complex plot.⁴³ That theory requires that tragedy should exhibit a paradoxical causality ('when things happen contrary to expectation yet on account of one another', *ὅταν γένηται παρὰ τὴν δόξαν δι' ἄλληλα*, 9.1452a4) in which human vulnerability to life-changing sufferings and changes of fortune comes to a climax at decisive moments of reversal and recognition. Aristotle fully embraces the idea of compelling emotional intensity at the centre of the experience of tragedy, but he also provides an explanatory and justificatory framing of this experience in the audience's awareness of the underlying structures of causality contained in the best tragic plots. The *Poetics*' conception of tragedy therefore legitimizes the mind's immersion in psychagogic emotionality by anchoring it to an understanding of the ineluctable connections which bring about human exposure to extremes of suffering.

To see more clearly what contributes to the emotionally 'ecstatic' side of this equation,⁴⁴ we need to track the somewhat oblique way in which Aristotle's argument unfolds. Consider the following set of six steps in the treatise's movement of thought and its nexus of sometimes submerged assumptions.

- Chapter 4 traces back the 'serious' (i.e. non-comic) tradition of Greek poetry to a hypothetical origin in oral,⁴⁵ improvised performances (including, at an early stage, 'hymns and encomia') which took as their subject the 'noble actions' (*καλὰς . . . πράξεις*, 1448b25) of noble characters; Homeric epic evolved from this tradition, in the process (though Aristotle does not pause to elucidate the point) prefiguring the 'forms' of tragedy (1448b34–1449a6).

⁴³ See n. 122 below on Gorgias and Plato. For the apparent separation of pity and fear in Aristophanes' *Frogs*, see Ch. 3 n. 60. It cannot be right, with Wigodsky 1995: 67, to distance *ψυχαγωγεῖν* at Arist. *Poet.* 6.1450a33 from tragic emotion.

⁴⁴ Aristotle would probably not himself have used the vocabulary of 'ecstasy' for intense tragic emotion; he tends to reserve it for strong passions of a destabilizing kind (e.g. *Eth. Eud.* 3.1, 1229a25–6, *Part. an.* 2.4, 650b34–51a3, *Poet.* 17.1455a34, though interpretation of the last is vexed: see e.g. Lucas 1968: 177–9); cf. *Rh.* 3.8, 1408b36, where the dactylic rhythm of epic is said to have an elevated effect on the mind, with Cope 1877: iii. 87. But Aristotle does use the closely related vocabulary of *ekplēxis* for tragic emotionality: see my text below.

⁴⁵ Cf. Ch. 1 n. 8.

- Chapter 6 (1449b24–8) advances a definition of tragedy: although Aristotle says that this draws together considerations already stated, the emotions of ‘pity and fear’ (as well as the concept of catharsis) have not been mentioned previously.⁴⁶ Later in chapter 6, as we have already seen, Aristotle highlights the plot components of ‘reversal’ and ‘recognition’, but only in chapters 10–11 does he clarify the role of these components.
- Chapter 7 stipulates principles for the appropriate size or length of a tragic plot and mentions for the first time, again without explanation, the notion of sequences of action which entail ‘change from prosperity to misfortune or from misfortune to prosperity’ (1451a13–14), a formula Aristotle invokes repeatedly thereafter.
- Chapter 9 supports the contention that pity and fear will be best induced by things which ‘happen contrary to expectation yet on account of one another’ (see above) with the additional remark that an effect of ‘wonder’, ‘amazement’, or ‘awe’ will result from events which at least *seem* to be causally significant (rather than merely accidental): this is the first mention of the idea of τὸ θαυμαστόν (1452a4–6), ‘the amazing/extraordinary’, which Aristotle touches on again in connection with tragedy in a corrupt passage at 18.1456a20 and which he describes at 24.1460a12–18 as an effect which *epic* can produce by (concealed) irrationalities.
- Chapter 10 distinguishes between ‘simple’ and ‘complex’ plots in terms of how the major ‘transformation’ or ‘transition’ (often translated ‘change of fortune’) in the characters’ lives is handled; Aristotle uses here the noun *metabasis* (1452a16–18), which he employs again in this same way, together with the cognate verb, in chapter 18 (1455b27–9).⁴⁷

⁴⁶ For the relevance of this to the case for treating the catharsis clause as an interpolation, see the Appendix to the present chapter.

⁴⁷ In the following chapter, 11.1452a23–31, and only there (in this sense), Aristotle uses the noun *μεταβολή* for the special kinds of ‘change’ involved in *peripeteia* and *anagnōrisis*. Elsewhere he uses the verb *μεταβάλλειν* as equivalent to the *μετάβασις* of ch. 10, i.e. for the transition or transformation of fortune which he takes every tragedy, simple or complex, to contain: see 7.1451a14 (with my text), 13.1452b34, 1453a9, 13–14 (the last three all within discussion of complex plots but not referring to the complex elements *per se*). Since Aristotle does not make a semantic distinction between *μεταβολή* and *μετάβασις* (cf. 1449a14, 37, both referring to the historical development of genres), or *μεταβάλλειν* and *μεταβαίνειν*, his usage in the *Poetics*

- Chapter 14 calls the *anagnôrisis* which follows a terrible deed done in ignorance emotionally ‘stunning’ or ‘gripping’ (ἐκπληκτικόν, 1454a4), with the implication of a great surge or concentration of pity and fear. Aristotle uses the corresponding noun, *ekplêxis*, in chapter 16 for what he counts as the intrinsic effect of the best type of *anagnôrisis*, the type which arises with a sort of inexorable logic from the causal sequence of the dramatic action.

To discern the schema of thought lying behind those various steps, let us work back from the idea of *ekplêxis* in the last of them. In chapter 25, when laying down his general approach to alleged ‘faults’ in poetry, Aristotle says that even a contravention of external standards of rationality (such as an ‘impossibility’ in a plot) is poetically justified if the poetry ‘achieves its own purpose’, i.e. ‘if in this way it renders one or other part of the poem more emotionally gripping (ἐκπληκτικώτερον)’ (1460b23–6). Here *ekplêxis* seems to stand for psychological peaks in the experience of poetry, at least of tragedy and epic, while in chapters 14 and 16 it is associated particularly with the taut moments of recognition around which complex plots hinge. In the *Topics*, Aristotle defines *ekplêxis* as an extreme ‘wonder’ or ‘amazement’ (θαυμασιότης).⁴⁸ This reinforces the implicit logic of the passages from the *Poetics* listed above. There is a web of connections between pity and fear (felt fundamentally, as chapter 13 states, for the undeserved sufferings of characters with whom the audience can imaginatively sympathize), the idea of ‘psychagogic’ enthrallment (a sense of being emotionally drawn out and compelled by the work), the effect of ‘wonder’ or ‘amazement’ (τὸ θαυμαστόν, a cognitively surprising or paradoxical impression, compelling the observer to desire further or deeper understanding, just as in philosophy),⁴⁹

shows that he regards *peripeteia* and/or *anagnôrisis* as a concentrated impingement of the general mutability of fortune.

⁴⁸ *Top.* 4.5, 126b14–31; further discussion in Belfiore 1992: 220–2.

⁴⁹ Wonder was the origin, and remains an underpinning, of philosophy, *Metaph.* 1.2, 982b12–17. It involves a sense of ‘ignorance’ and therefore (*Rh.* 1.11, 1371a31–4) a natural desire to know/understand. Cf. e.g. *Part. an.* 1.5, 645a16–17, ‘in all natural phenomena there is an element of the wonderful’, following a passage where contemplating nature is compared to, but ranked higher than, contemplating artistic images. In both philosophy and poetry (cf. Aristotle’s comparison with myth at *Met.* 1.2, 982b18–19), wonder is a knowledge-desiring response to things which arrest one’s attention and invite further interpretation.

the ironies of the complex plot (in which lines of human agency confound their agents' intentions), and the piercing psychological 'shudder' of *ekplêxis* (which suggests an acute emotional impact).⁵⁰ When these motifs are placed together in this way, they bring out just how far Aristotle goes in incorporating intensely heightened emotionality at the heart of his theory of tragedy (and epic). Where the Platonic Socrates had regarded yielding to such emotional experience as potentially subversive of philosophical rationality and psychic health, Aristotle counts it as entirely compatible with the values of his own philosophy.

Why should that be? One important strand of an answer to this question is that Aristotle implicitly operates in the *Poetics* with something like a criterion of emotional authenticity. We can see this by glancing again at the disapproval chapter 14 expresses of those spuriously tragic effects—stagemanaged *coups de théâtre*—which he thinks are sometimes aimed at by those responsible for the visual design of tragedy. He brings such effects under the heading of 'the sensational(ist)' or 'the portentous' (τὸ τερατώδες, 1453b9), contrasting this with the 'pity and fear' which define the genre's appropriate emotional domain. Aristotle elsewhere uses the vocabulary of *τερατώδης* and cognates principally for unnaturally freakish occurrences, startling exceptions to nature's orderly regularities: things which others, though not Aristotle himself, might classify as religious 'portents'.⁵¹

⁵⁰ For 'shuddering', see the verb *φρίττειν* at *Poet.* 14.1453b5 and compare Gorg. *Hel.* 9, with Ch. 6, 274. (Cf. Kermode 2010 for the equivalent term in T. S. Eliot's critical vocabulary.) *Ekplêxis* can encompass various emotions (e.g. erotic feeling at Pl. *Symp.* 192b, *Resp.* 3.390c; stunned admiration, *Resp.* 9.576d, 577a, 591d, cf. 619a; the pleasure of song, Pl. *Phdr.* 259b), but it should not be equated with surprise as such, pace Lowe 2000a: 12, 155: surprise is sometimes but not always a factor; see Pl. *Ion* 535b, which presupposes prior audience knowledge of the work/story. In the *Poetics* *ekplêxis* is equally compatible with pity and fear (note that 16.1455a17 corresponds to 11.1452a8–1452b1); see again Pl. *Ion* 535b, where fear is implied and pity explicit. As regards fear, cf. Arist. *Rh.* 2.8, 1385b33, with Gorg. *Hel.* 9 and Ch. 3 n. 60 for the link with tragedy. For the adaptation of *ekplêxis* to different critical models of poetic experience, see Ch. 7, 332–5, on Longinus and others.

⁵¹ See esp. *Gen. an.* 4.3–4, 769b10–770b27, for 'the portentous' as monstrous biological deformity. In the poetic/mythological realm, Isoc. 12.1 refers to (prose) narratives 'full of sensationalism and falsehood/fiction' (*τερατείαι καὶ ψευδολογίας μεστούς*); cf. Ch. 6 n. 76. Strabo 1.2.3 refers hypothetically to 'mythical sensationalism' (*τερατολογίας μυθικῆς*) as a supposed feature of those parts of Homeric epic which extend beyond the observable world; this alludes to Eratosthenes' view that Homer cultivated effects of this kind (1.2.19). Strabo 1.2.7, denying that Homer

One would like to know exactly what kind of items of tragic staging he would have bracketed in this category. It is clear he regards them as an inauthentic substitute for 'the terrible' or 'the fearful' (τὸ φοβερόν, 1453b8–9), and they would presumably have included *grand guignol* representations of the weirdly gruesome. Whether Aristotle would have classed the Furies of Aeschylus' *Eumenides* in this category, or whether indeed he had Aeschylean plays at all in mind, remains uncertain. As it happens, Aristophanes' *Frogs* shows that it was possible to associate 'the portentous' specifically with Aeschylean dramaturgy and with what some may have considered its overblown effects (including the extended dramatic silences of individual characters).⁵² But we cannot be sure that there were not also positive uses of *τέρας* terminology to describe overwhelming tragic moments; not everyone who spoke of Aeschylus in such language need have done so disparagingly.⁵³ Aristotle's contrast at the start of *Poetics* 14 between the impact of *opsis* and of plot could, in any case, just as well apply to an example like that of the blinded Oedipus in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*. The (probable) reference to Sophocles' play at 1453b6–7 may indicate that Aristotle has this example in mind. It is plausible that he would have deprecated the use of an extravagantly gory mask to carry the main weight of emotional force in this instance, privileging visual shock for its own sake over the significance with which Oedipus' action is endowed by the entire structure of the plot.

'sensationalizes everything', and 1.2.9, denying that Homer ever neglected truth altogether or produced 'empty sensationalism' (κενὴν τερατολογίαν), shows that his own Stoic poetics is not entirely comfortable with this concept. The key is provided by 1.2.8, where Strabo concedes the value of τὸ τερατώδες (including frightening quasi-tragic myths) as a poetic means of enticing *children* and uneducated adults to learn things they lack the rationality to learn directly from philosophy.

⁵² See *Frogs* 833–4, referring to the mock-solemnity of Aeschylean silences; but in response, as it were, at *Frogs* 1342 Aeschylus uses the noun *τέρας* ironically (to mark a gap between tragic tone and banal circumstances) within his parody of a neurotic Euripidean heroine's monody. Cf. Ar. *Clouds* 364, which associates *τέρας* terms with (supposedly) awesome divine manifestations. Other comic cases which reveal pejorative overtones are Ar. *Kn.* 627 (Cleon's thundering rhetoric), *Clouds* 318 (Socrates' intellectual trickery), *Lys.* 762 (melodramatic lies).

⁵³ The *Vita Aesch.* (Page 1972: 332) states that Aeschylus used staging and plot 'for awesomely fearful effects rather than illusion' (πρὸς ἐκπληξιν τερατώδη μᾶλλον ἢ πρὸς ἀπάτην). The judgement, of uncertain origin, probably associates Aeschylus with 'terror' rather than 'pity' (cf. Ch. 3 n. 60); see the caution of Taplin (1977: 44–7), including a denial that Arist. *Poet.* 14 refers to Aeschylus.

However we may choose to speculate on that point, the telling thing for the foundations of Aristotle's poetic principles is that unlike pity and fear, whose general function in life is discussed in book 2 of the *Rhetoric*, τὸ τερατώδες, 'the portentous' or 'the sensational', has no valid place in his psychology of the emotions. When Aristotle indicates that the sensational has no legitimate role in tragedy, he does not imply that there is some other genre of poetry to which it appropriately belongs. The pleasure he seems to accept that it might induce in (some) audiences of tragedy is presumably a kind of frisson at the visually successful projection of horror or shock. Except as a marginal consideration in biology, freakishly sensational occurrences are, from an Aristotelian perspective, mere aberrations. They can accordingly contribute nothing to an understanding of patterns of action and suffering in the human world.

Furthermore, while the *Poetics* finds a place in both tragedy and epic for effects of 'wonder' or 'amazement', we have already noted that Aristotle requires these to be attuned to a sense of implicit causality and coherence ('when things happen contrary to expectation yet on account of one another'). This requirement too excludes 'the sensational', which could never (as Aristotle sees it) encourage any further, deeper reflection on the meaning of events. The pity and fear appropriate to tragedy are not arbitrarily generic markers; their appropriateness implies a sort of authenticity in 'the representation of action and life' (μίμησις... πράξεως καὶ βίου, 6.1450a16–17: see below). The emotions in question are the psychological correlate of Aristotle's belief that certain kinds of events—those involving at least the imminent threat of great suffering, and bringing about major transformations in the lives of those concerned—show important things about the conditions and possibilities of human existence. The sensational, by contrast, could offer nothing more than a startling frisson.⁵⁴

The intensity and authenticity of emotional response posited by the Aristotelian model of tragedy presupposes, then, a kind of 'truth to life' in what is shown and evoked in the structure of a plot. The

⁵⁴ Gould (1990: 130–2, 269) goes too far in translating Aristotle's τὸ τερατώδες as 'religious shock' or 'holy dread' (associated, he thinks, with initiatory rites): Aristotle might well have included in this category certain effects with religious associations, but the phrasing of *Poet.* 14.1453b7–11 is more specifically theatrical than allowed by Gould (who is also wrong, *ibid.* 132, to say Aristotle thinks tragic emotions are 'best' aroused 'with no "spectacle" at all'; cf. n. 42 above).

status of this truth to life is not, however, easy to pin down to a simple or consistent form of realism. It is clearly not, in the first place, a matter of historical or factual particulars: chapter 9 insists that even if a tragedy is based on historical materials the poet must still 'make' or 'compose' (*ποιεῖν*) those materials into an imaginatively reconfigured structure, an 'emplotment', in its own right (1451b27–32). Nor, on the other hand, does Aristotle expect of (tragic) poetry the truth of an abstractly formulated and philosophically articulated thesis. The *Poetics* leaves little if any room for poetic 'statements' or propositional formulations, except on the part of characters in their expression of 'thought', *dianoia*; it operates instead with a concept of mimesis as comprising only narrative and dramatic modes of representation.⁵⁵ Yet chapter 9 itself famously declares that poetry, in its own partially or quasi-philosophical fashion, 'speaks more of universals' than of particulars. Since the implicit or embedded universals in question ('the kinds of things which could happen and are possible in terms of probability or necessity', 1451a37–8; *alias* 'the kinds of things it suits a certain kind of person to say or do', 1451b8–9) are communicated through a dramatic medium to which it is appropriate to respond, in tragedy's case, with strong impulses of pity and fear, these emotions themselves must be aligned with the intelligibility of the universals concerned. The emotions, that is, must answer to the significant forms which *underlie*, and allow the mind to make sense of, the particulars of the (human) world.⁵⁶

When an audience is drawn into intense fear and pity for the characters of tragedy, Aristotle supposes that it is not simply having its feelings exposed to a kind of nervous excitation. Rather, the emotions—which are a dynamic factor in the mind's evaluative reactions to life—both reflect and help to shape how spectators grasp and see the underlying patterns of significance in a plot's structure of

⁵⁵ On the 'thought' of characters, see 19.1456a34–1456b8: Aristotle allows here in passing for a kind of implicit 'thought' in the fabric of a plot-structure, but of a kind which must emerge *ἀνευ διδασκαλίας*, 'without explicit statement'. For the larger problem of what Aristotle does (not) allow to the poet's 'own voice', I am less sure of my position on *Poet.* 24.1460a5–11 in Halliwell 2002a: 164–71 after reading the arguments of de Jong (2005), Lattmann (2005), but the latter does not clinch his case for ascribing to *Poet.* 3 and 24 a distinction between author and fictive narrator.

⁵⁶ For my interpretation of the 'universals' of *Poet.* 9, see Halliwell 2001: 95–104. Gill (1993: 78) proposes a carefully guarded thesis that Aristotle ascribes a kind of truth-claim to poetry's universals; cf. Rösler 1980: 310–11 (aligning the point with a concept of fiction).

action and suffering.⁵⁷ The value of tragedy, on Aristotle's interpretation, channels understanding (which chapter 4 tells us it is the function of mimesis to satisfy) through surges of deep emotion (especially at points of *ekplêxis*). In short, the best works of mimesis activate a complex kind of emotional understanding, focusing that understanding on imaginative scenarios which are nonetheless a 'representation of life' (*μίμησις . . . βίου*, 6.1450a16–17).

The significance of 'life' in that phrase cannot be a formula for a fine-grained mode of aesthetic realism.⁵⁸ Aristotle is far from claiming that tragedy gets close to the texture of life as lived and experienced by individuals. This point stands out above all in his contrast between the tightly organized unity he demands of a poetic plot (whose structure of 'beginning, middle, and end' must exhibit causal stringency, unlinearity, and non-redundancy) and the diffuse multifariousness of ordinary existence. At the start of chapter 8 he says: 'A plot is not unified, as some think, if built round an individual. Any entity has innumerable features, not all of which cohere into a unity of any kind [alternatively: an indefinitely large number of events befall any individual, not all of which combine to form a unity of any kind]; likewise, an individual performs many actions from which no unitary action arises.'⁵⁹ He then proceeds to criticize epic poems (*Heracleids*, *Theseids*, and the like) whose basis is the narrative of a single hero's entire life, and he correspondingly praises Homer's *Odyssey* for *not* trying to include 'every feature of the hero's life'. It

⁵⁷ Taylor (2008) draws on a modern 'simulation theory of fiction' to explicate Aristotle's model of learning from poetry; he makes several good points, but his assumption that tragic fear involves 'identification' (274–5) clashes with my own reading of fear in the *Poetics*: see n. 96 below. For a quasi-Aristotelian account of emotional understanding in the theatre, see Woodruff 2008: esp. 206–7; cf. Robinson 2005: 105–35, though her model of bodily-response-plus-cognitive-monitoring is perhaps more analytical than Aristotle's (cf. n. 105 below). On the role of emotion in affecting/informing 'judgement', see nn. 105–6 below.

⁵⁸ For an interpretation of 'mimesis of life' in relation to Aristotle's concept of artistic unity, see Halliwell (2011*b*). Bernstein (2009: 74–5) distorts Aristotle's model of the relationship between plot and life. The treatment of unity in Heath (1989: 38–55) has a tendentious agenda: see Ford (1991: esp. 137–40), Lamberton (1991), Halliwell (1991). For other Greek texts which make 'life' the object of mimesis, see Bywater 1909: 166, on 1450a17, Halliwell 2002a: 287–8.

⁵⁹ 8.1451a16–19: *πολλὰ γὰρ καὶ ἄπειρα τῷ ἐνὶ συμβαίνειν, ἐξ ὧν ἐνίων οὐδὲν ἐστὶν εἶν οὕτως δὲ καὶ πράξεις ἐνὸς πολλαὶ εἰσιν, ἐξ ὧν μία οὐδεμία γίνεται πρᾶξις*. For alternative interpretations of the first part of this sentence, see Vahlen 1885: 135–6 (properties of an entity), Bywater 1909: 184–5 (experiences of an individual).

is hardly surprising, therefore, that Aristotle found unsatisfying Alcidas' description of the *Odyssey* as a 'beautiful mirror of human life'.⁶⁰ He cites that phrase in the *Rhetoric* as an example of a stilted metaphor. It is likely that he also thought the idea of a mirror could not do justice to the principles of artistic selection and design on which he places so much stress in the *Poetics*.

Yet Aristotle nonetheless looks to poetry, even to the mythically magnified domain of tragedy and epic, for an imaginative vividness which can sustain an audience's cognitive and emotional engagement. This point is salient in chapter 17, where he outlines a psychology of poetic creativity in which the poet must 'put things as much as possible before the mind's eye (πρὸ ὀμμάτων) when composing... seeing them with maximum vividness (ἐναργέστατα), as though present at the actual events'.⁶¹ The poet needs to do this partly for the sake of visualizing the overall coherence of the dramatic action, to ensure that different parts of the plot fit together consistently. But he also needs to do it for the sake of placing himself 'inside' the states of mind of his characters and thereby managing to give the 'most authentic' expression (ἀληθινώτατα, 1455a32) to their actions, utterances, and feelings. In this way, dramatic rationality and psychological authenticity come together in the act of composition.

This kind of authenticity, however, is not an end in itself but a means to the desired psychagogic impact on the audience. The spectators of tragedy must be able to understand why the characters act as they do, as well as how they react to the larger circumstances in which they act (and suffer); they must be able to sense and grasp the underlying nexus of universals encapsulating a sense of 'the kinds of things which it suits a certain kind of person to say or do according to probability or necessity' (9.1451b8–9). Emotional authenticity and the dramatic rationality of an implied structure of universals operate in harness with one another. They form an imaginative armature within which the audience, in turn, can become both cognitively and emotionally absorbed in a mimetically conjured world, exercising in the process a kind of quasi-philosophical contemplation (*theōria*) by means of imaginative thought and feeling. For Aristotle, mimesis was no unmediated depiction of 'life' but a reworking of some of its

⁶⁰ *Rh.* 3.3, 1406b11–13, καλὸν ἀνθρωπίνου βίου κάτοπτρον.

⁶¹ 17.1455a22–5. For justification of speaking here of 'imagination', see Halliwell 2003b: 63–5.

inherent possibilities into dramatically intelligible form. And that, he surely supposed, was a sufficient riposte to the concerns of his Platonic friends.

THE AESTHETIC AND MORAL PSYCHOLOGY OF CATHARSIS

To ascribe to Aristotle a theory of poetic experience in which intense emotions fuse with cognitive insight to produce a sort of ‘emotional understanding’ will strike some readers as at odds with what has become the most notorious and vexed feature of the *Poetics*, its unexplained concept of catharsis. That concept, found in the last clause of the definition of tragedy (‘through pity and fear accomplishing the catharsis of such emotions’),⁶² continues to pull many interpreters towards a model of tragic emotion as functioning in a self-contained, non-cognitive manner. The dominant line of thought in modern readings of catharsis was established by an influential article of Jacob Bernays (uncle by marriage of Sigmund Freud) first published in 1857. Bernays insisted on the sense ‘purgation’ which turns the end-result of tragedy into a process of flushing out unwanted, even pathological, emotions.⁶³ If this was what Aristotle meant by tragic catharsis, then my own account of his commitment to a form of ‘emotional understanding’, an account which depends on the premise that the emotions themselves are part and parcel of an audience’s ethical comprehension and judgement of a tragic plot, must be mistaken. I shall argue in what follows, however, that ‘purgation’

⁶² δι’ ἐλέου καὶ φόβου περαίνουσα τὴν τῶν τοιούτων παθημάτων, *Poet.* 6.1449b27–8 (the reading of MS B). On three fiercely disputed issues relating to these words, I simply reaffirm my position here: (i) *παθήματα* is equivalent to *πάθη* (often so in Aristotle: e.g. *De an.* 403a3/11, 16–25, *Eth. Eud.* 1220b8–12, 1221b35–6) and does not denote ‘dispositions’ as opposed to emotions; (ii) the genitive *παθημάτων* is objective (the emotions are the object of the process of catharsis); (iii) the emotions in question are essentially pity and fear (thus making *τοιούτων* equivalent to ‘just mentioned’, as commonly in Aristotle, though a looser construal is not ruled out). For radical proposals to emend catharsis out of the text of the *Poetics*, see the Appendix to this chapter.

⁶³ Bernays (1857), repr. in Bernays 1880: 1–118; Bernays (2006) translates Bernays 1880: 1–32. On Bernays and Freud cf. Sulloway 1980: 56–7, Momigliano 1994: 162–3 (too uncritical of Bernays’ views).

readings of catharsis are a falsification of Aristotle's position and of the larger philosophical psychology which underpins it.⁶⁴

My case will rest on the twin claims that in the interpretation of catharsis it is misguided to divorce psychology from ethics or to detach ethics from aesthetics. Although a definitive understanding of catharsis will always (in the absence of new evidence) elude us, attempts to isolate catharsis from the broader realm of Aristotle's moral psychology can be shown to deviate from his basic convictions about the function of emotions or passions (*pathê*) in the ethical virtues of the soul.⁶⁵ Catharsis, as located by Aristotle in responses to both tragedy and (in *Politics* 8) to certain kinds of music, is certainly a distinctive feature of the experience of mimetic art forms. If we employ the category of 'aesthetics' to mean, or at least include, the philosophy of (mimetic) art,⁶⁶ it follows that in that sense Aristotelian catharsis is an aesthetic concept. But that, as I hope to demonstrate, is very far from saying that it is a concept devoid of ethical significance.

The catharsis controversy of the past century and a half has been marked by a display of confidence on the part of many interpreters that stands virtually in inverse ratio to the quality of evidence available on the subject. Bernays set a regrettable example in this respect, using a hectoring rhetoric which cast aspersions even on the sanity of

⁶⁴ What follows is a modified version of Halliwell (2003*d*). Halliwell 1998*a*: 350–6 surveys interpretations of catharsis; *ibid.* 184–201 for a statement of my own approach (first publ. 1986) to which I still largely adhere. A selection of older readings in Luserke (1991); cf. the overviews of Holzhausen 2000: 7–33, Woodruff 2009*b*: 618–23. Recent discussions of note include Dilcher 2007, Donini 2008: pp. xcii–cxx, Schmitt 2008: 476–510, cf. 333–48, Seidensticker 2009, Guastini 2010: 160–72. I leave aside the view of catharsis as an *internal* property of tragic plot: anticipated by Goethe's *Nachlese zu Aristoteles' Poetik* (first publ. 1827; see Goethe 1998: 355–7, with commentary *ibid.* 608–11, English tr. in Goethe 1994: 197–9), this idea has recently been revived in Husain (2002); see Halliwell (2002*b*). On the difficult evidence for traces of Aristotle's views in Philodemus, responding to the dialogue *On Poets*, Janko 2011: 372–7, 446–59, 512–21, should now be consulted, though many details remain fraught with uncertainty.

⁶⁵ For the present argument, I treat 'ethical' and 'moral' as interchangeable, and both as related to Aristotle's uses of *êthikos* (see 238–41 below). Nuttall (1996: 1–16) fatally neglects the broader evidence for Aristotle's attitudes to the emotions; cf. the review in Halliwell (1998*b*).

⁶⁶ See Halliwell (2002*a*: 6–14 and *passim*) for this idea of aesthetics in Aristotle and other ancient texts.

anyone who disagreed with him.⁶⁷ Given the lack of any explanation of catharsis in the *Poetics*, together with the fact that the further discussion promised by Aristotle at *Politics* 8.7, 1341b38–40, does not survive, circumspection ought to be obligatory. My central aim here is not to traverse yet again the whole field of debate but to argue for a framework of interpretation that integrates psychology, ethics, and aesthetics. I shall do so in the first instance by attempting to remove the stumbling block which many scholars believe is placed in the way of such an approach by the references to musical and poetic catharsis in the *Politics*.

There are three main reasons for accepting (as a minority of scholars have refused to do) that *Politics* 8.6–7 has a bearing on the interpretation of tragic catharsis in the *Poetics*: first, the promise at *Politics* 1341b38–40 that Aristotle will offer a fuller account of catharsis in a discussion of *poetry* (whether that designates our *Poetics* or not); secondly, the appearance of pity and fear in the same context of the *Politics* (1342a12); thirdly, the fact that in both texts Aristotle is dealing with the emotional power of arts he considers to be mimetic (i.e. on my construal, representational and/or expressive of possible human realities). This is not, however, to say that *Politics* 8 (whose text is gravely problematic at several key points) provides all the information we need to interpret tragic catharsis, nor that everything said of musical catharsis in the *Politics* is transferable to tragic catharsis in the *Poetics*. The extent of these qualifications will gradually emerge.⁶⁸

We find a trio of references to catharsis in *Politics* 8.6–7. *Prima facie*, it is the first of these which poses the most direct threat to any view like mine which posits a tight connection between psychology and ethics in the workings of tragic catharsis. Here Aristotle describes the aulos, used among other things to accompany the lyric portions of tragedy, as an instrument which is not *êthikon*, i.e. intrinsically expressive of *êthos* or character, but rather *orgiastikon*, i.e. suitable for expression of ecstatic emotions; ‘so it should be used’, he adds, ‘for contexts of the kind in which the hearer’s contemplation has more of

⁶⁷ See esp. Bernays 1880: 13, ‘kein Besonnener’ (= Bernays 2006: 166: ‘No one in his right mind’).

⁶⁸ My references to the text of *Pol.* 8 follow the edn. of Dreizehnter (1970) unless otherwise indicated. Schütrumpf (2005) is the fullest commentary, well documented but marred by some dogmatism (cf. n. 106 below); Susemihl and Hicks (1894) remains valuable.

a capacity for catharsis than for learning'.⁶⁹ Wolfgang Schadewaldt thought the implications of this for catharsis were open and shut: 'The separation of catharsis from education and learning is so decisively clear', he wrote, 'that it is hard to conceive how, a century after clear-thinking people drew attention to it, anyone can continue to make a connection between Aristotle's musico-poetic catharsis and ethics.'⁷⁰ But Schadewaldt, I submit, lost sight of the larger context of this remark in *Politics* 8. He might have modified his cut-and-dried reading of Aristotle's observations on the aulos if he had fully pondered a passage earlier in the book, at *Politics* 8.5, 1340a5–12. There Aristotle poses the question whether music can have an ethical effect on the soul ('whether its influence is also exerted on our characters and souls', εἴ πη πρὸς τὸ ἦθος συντείνει καὶ πρὸς τὴν ψυχὴν). He responds by saying that an affirmative answer will be justified if music actively affects the qualities of our character, 'if we become through it people of a certain sort of character' (εἰ ποιοῖ τινες τὰ ἦθη γιγνόμεθα δι' αὐτῆς); and he then asserts that this is evident from a great deal of musical experience, in particular of the melodies of Olympus, which he calls 'emotionally thrilling' (ἐνθουσιαστικός). In relation to these melodies, he adds tellingly that *enthousiasmos* is 'a passion of our ethical psychology' or 'an emotion which belongs to our soul's character' (τοῦ περὶ τὴν ψυχὴν ἥθους πάθος).⁷¹

Now the so-called melodies of Olympus, which were undoubtedly performed on the aulos, are later classified precisely as 'thrilling', *enthousiastika* (8.7, 1341b34), in a passage which distinguishes them from two other classes of melody, 'ethical' (*êthika*) and 'action-related' or 'expressive of action' (*praktika*). This shows two things of basic importance. The first is that Aristotle holds to a general thesis that music of many kinds, by mimetically representing/expressing and in

⁶⁹ *Pol.* 8.6, 1341a21–4: οὐκ ἔστιν ὁ αὐλὸς ἠθικὸν ἀλλὰ μάλλον ὀργιαστικόν, ὥστε πρὸς τοὺς τοιοῦτους αὐτῷ καιροὺς χρηστέον, ἐν οἷς ἡ θεωρία κάθαρσιν μάλλον δύναται ἢ μάθησιν.

⁷⁰ Schadewaldt 1955: 153 (my tr.): 'Bereits diese Trennung der *κάθαρσις* von *παιδεία* und *μάθησις* ist so zwingend klar, daß man schwer begreift, wie man hundert Jahre, nachdem klar denkende Männer darauf hingewiesen haben, fortfahren kann, die musikalisch-dichterische *κάθαρσις* bei Aristoteles mit Ethik in Verbindung zu bringen.' Schadewaldt's view is endorsed by Ford 2004: 326.

⁷¹ See Susemihl in Susemihl and Hicks (1894: 622–4) for discussion of this last phrase. On the melodies of Olympus note especially *Pl. Symp.* 215c (echoed at [*Pl.*] *Minos* 318b). Schütrumpf 2005: 55, with 612–14, translates *ἐνθουσιασμός* as 'Ekstase'; so too, now, 'ecstasy' in Janko 2011: 453 (but contrast 'hysteria', *ibid.* 517).

consequence communicating ethical qualities (*êthika*, as used at 8.5, 1340a21), changes the listener's soul by impinging on the dynamics of his/her character.⁷² The second is that the distinctions subsequently drawn by Aristotle between three types of melody—explicitly presented as a more technical classification⁷³—involve a specialized, more restricted sense of the term *êthikos*. The principle underpinning both these points is corroborated by a passage further on in the same argument. At *Politics* 8.5, 1340a38–b7, Aristotle asserts, on the basis of what he regards as culturally obvious evidence, that there are 'mimetic representations/expressions (*mimêmata*) of *êthos* in musical melodies themselves' (or, if one adopts Kassel's conjecture, '*mimêmata* of *êthos* itself in melodies').⁷⁴ He conspicuously does *not* say that this is true of only certain melodies (at this stage the tripartite scheme of melodies has not yet been introduced) but means his claim to hold good for all the main varieties of music encompassed by his discussion.⁷⁵

It is vital, then, to realize that Aristotle can apply the vocabulary of *êthos* and *êthikos* in subtly variant ways. We should not be hasty in interpreting his sometimes 'shorthand' uses of such terminology. Before proceeding with the analysis of *Politics* 8, it is worth commenting that this use of *êthikos* in both broader and narrower senses, with reference to mimetic artforms, is paralleled in the *Poetics* itself. In this work the same adjective is used both (i) with general application to the dramatic depiction or expression of character, for example in the reference to 'speeches expressive of character' (*ῥήσεις ἠθικάς*) at

⁷² I justify treating Aristotelian (musical) mimesis as embracing aspects of both representation and expression in Halliwell 2002a: 234–49. Woerther (2008) offers little more than general paraphrase.

⁷³ Notice Aristotle's self-consciousness about musical technicality at 8.7, 1341b27–32: we can infer that the tripartite scheme of *melê* was not entirely standard, though it may build on widely shared convictions. Cf. the musical comparison at *Pol.* 4.3, 1290a19–22, which shows that the classification of modes and melodies was open to debate. The observations on music and *êthos* at *Pol.* 8.5, 1340a6–12 (see my text above) appeal not to expert arguments but *general experience* of music.

⁷⁴ *ἐν δὲ τοῖς μέλεσιν αὐτοῖς [αὐτῶν: Kassel] ἔστι μιμήματα τῶν ἠθῶν*, 1340a38–9. Likewise with musical rhythms: Aristotle speaks of different rhythms as each having a different *êthos* (1340b8). Extrapolating from rhythm to melody, we might say that even the difference between *êthika*, *praktika*, and *enthousiastika* melodies is, in one sense, a difference of *êthos*, despite the awkwardness of terminology this involves. Cf. Barker 1984: 179 n. 31, though the reference to catharsis that follows is too simple; cf. Barker 2005: 99–111. Simpson (1998: 277) rightly notes the difference between Aristotle's broader and narrow references to 'character' in music.

1450a29 (cf. 1460b3), but also (ii) as a technical label for a specific type of tragedy/epic (1456a1, 1459b9, 15). This second usage patently does not mean that character(ization)—*êthos* in the standard sense—is found *only* in the type of play labelled *êthikê*, any more than *pathos*, as defined at the end of *Poetics* 11, occurs only in the kind of play later categorized as *pathêtikê*. Rather, certain tragedies count as *êthos*-centred (*ἡθικός*) and *pathos*-centred (*παθητικός*) in virtue of a particularly prominent use of the components in question, *êthos* and *pathos*. Similarly, it is entirely consistent for Aristotle to class the melodies of Olympus as technically *enthousiastika*, not *êthika* (or *praktika*), while also maintaining that they strongly exemplify the fundamental power of music to impinge on the hearer's *êthos* (thereby 'changing' the soul) and accordingly deserve to be considered, on one level, as a matter of ethical psychology.

By the same token, the statement in the *Politics* that the aulos is more 'orgiastic' or 'ecstatic' than 'ethical' should be understood as a typical piece of Aristotelian abbreviation. It does not mean that the aulos is incapable of performing music, or of mediating musical experiences, that are in any way *êthikos*, which would flatly contradict the comment on the melodies of Olympus at 1340a9–10. What it means is that the instrument's musical qualities or expressive register do not primarily suit the range of emotions and ethically beneficial experiences that Aristotle regards as essential for educational purposes.⁷⁶ Equally, the related statement, in the same sentence of the *Politics*, that the aulos befits occasions on which contemplation of the music performed 'has more of a capacity for catharsis than for learning' (*ἡ θεωρία κάθαρσιν μᾶλλον δύναται ἢ μάθησιν*: note, once again, the comparative phrasing) does not entail that catharsis is wholly independent of cognitive processes of understanding and/or learning on the part of the hearer. Here as often elsewhere in this stretch of the *Politics* Aristotle employs the term *mathêsis* principally with reference to educational 'learning'; he has used it repeatedly with this force in the preceding sentences of this same argument.⁷⁷ He is

⁷⁶ In addition to the comparative formulation at 1341a21–2 (the aulos is not *êthikon* but 'more/rather' *orgiastikon*), note the superlative, *ἡθικωτάταις* (sc. *ἀρμονίαις*), 'the most ethical melody-types', at 1342a3 (contrast the plain form at 1342a28): so the difference between melody-types at 1341b34 ff. is, from one point of view, a matter of degree.

⁷⁷ See 1341a6, 9, 10; cf. 1.7, 1255b26, 7.17, 1336a24, 1336b37, 8.1, 1337a25, 1337b9, 22, etc. My present treatment of *Pol.* 1341a23–4 modifies Halliwell 1998a: 195.

not, therefore, to be taken as simply ruling out that catharsis and *mathêsis* in a broader sense could be combined, or could coexist, in the same musical (or other aesthetic) experience.⁷⁸ Catharsis is not contrasted, in other words, with every kind of ‘understanding’ but with musical experiences intended directly to teach the young the appreciation (or, for that matter, the practice) of particular kinds and features of music.

A similar consideration applies to the second reference to catharsis, at *Politics* 8.6, 1341b38, where its mention as a ‘benefit’ of music separate from *paideia* (‘education’) involves a contrast with education *sensu stricto*, i.e. of the young, and does not exclude the possibility that catharsis could have an ethically educative dimension in an extended or metaphorical sense of the word.⁷⁹ Failure to distinguish between *paideia* in the socially narrower, institutionalized sense and ‘education’ (or equivalent terms in other modern languages) as a metaphor for ethical influence has marred debate over catharsis, not least on the part of those keen to deny the moral weight of tragedy in Aristotle’s perspective.⁸⁰ In *Politics* 8 Aristotle himself does not use the terminology of ‘education’ (*paideia*, etc.) metaphorically or by extension to adults. But partly for that very reason, partly for others already outlined, his separation of catharsis and *paideia* cannot tell us the whole story of what he thinks about music’s capacity to work on its listeners’ souls in ethically beneficial ways.

If we now survey the whole framework constructed for the discussion of music in *Politics* 8, it becomes apparent that pace Schadewaldt

⁷⁸ Newman (1887–1902: iii. 552) points out that at *Pol.* 1339a36 Aristotle speaks directly of *mathêsis* derived from listening to music, though the text has been doubted. Ford (1995: 119) is typical of many in not reckoning with the restricted usage of *mathêsis* in *Pol.* 8. See Halliwell (2001) for the importance of *mathêsis/manthanein* within Aristotle’s larger perspective on mimetic art.

⁷⁹ Such metaphorical usage was available in Aristotle’s time: cf. the idea in Timocles fr. 6.7 of the spectator ‘educated’ (*παιδευθεῖς*), i.e. given a better understanding of life, by tragedy; for other details of the same fragment, cf. n. 39 above, n. 92 below. At *Eth. Eud.* 1.2, 1214b8, Aristotle posits *paideia* as a possible goal for an entire life: this is a different matter, presumably denoting lifelong dedication to particular activities (such as music and poetry) first learnt when young.

⁸⁰ For tacit conflation of literal and metaphorical senses see e.g. Lear 1988: 300, 304. Sifakis (2001: 99) misses the point by insisting only on the non-metaphorical status of *paideia* in Aristotle’s usage. Cf. the comment of Zierl (1994: 80) on the lack of any reference to ‘eine mögliche pädagogische Leistung der Tragödie’ in the *Poetics*. Kraut (1997: 203–6) helps one to see that in *Pol.* 8 musical *paideia* as such relates only to children, not adults.

and others a strong cleavage between ethical and non-ethical experience of music would undermine Aristotle's entire enterprise in this part of the work. The main thrust of the text's educational principles for the uses of music is this: that for the sake of acquiring stable dispositions of virtue the young must become habituated to enjoying music in the right way, which means taking pleasure correctly in music that arouses emotion and thereby helps to mould character (1340a14–28).⁸¹ But what is the point of learning this if not to continue to enjoy music in an ethically appropriate way as adults? Aristotle is unambiguous about this point at 1340b38–9: 'the young should participate directly in musical performance, but when older they should give up doing so while still being able to judge musical beauty (τὰ καλὰ κρίνειν) and to take pleasure in it correctly because of the learning (*mathêsis*) they went through during their youth'. Of course, Aristotle need not suppose that each and every musical experience will make an observable difference to the character of the person concerned, particularly when the characters of adults are fully formed. Equally, though, we must remember that Aristotle does not believe that *êthos* ever ceases altogether to be subject to the shaping influence of experience.⁸² Given, however, his general premise that many kinds of music arouse 'ethical' feelings or emotions (*pathê*), he is committed to believing that such experiences are cumulatively relevant to the formation and exercise of character. It is only when specifying the best kinds of music for strictly educational purposes that Aristotle feels a need to demote the aulos as unsuitable for the developing characters of the young, on the grounds that much aulos music is remote from the expression of stable virtues such as courage (cf. 1342b13–14).

What I have said so far about *Politics* 8.5–7 does not purport to clinch a substantive interpretation of catharsis, but to show that Aristotle's argument, when scrutinized with sufficient sensitivity, resists a drastic division between the psychology of catharsis and the ethical character (*êthos*) of the audiences of music. All the major kinds of music envisaged in *Politics* 8 (and in the *Poetics*)⁸³

⁸¹ See 1339a24–5, 1339b1, 1340b39, and cf. 254 below.

⁸² See *Eth. Nic.* 10.9, 1180a1–4 for an explicit statement on the continuation of ethical habituation throughout adult life.

⁸³ Cf. *Poet.* 1.1447a14–16, which classes 'most music for aulos and for the kithara' as mimetic. (It is impossible to say which—marginal—kinds of music Aristotle did *not* count as mimetic.)

are mimetically representational-cum-expressive. In Aristotle's terms that unequivocally means that they are all capable of affecting the hearer's *êthos*, more particularly the emotions or passions, *pathê*, that contribute to *êthos*. What emerges from the final reference in the *Politics* to catharsis, at 8.7, 1342a3–29 (though the state of the text counsels caution on some of the details), is that Aristotle believes catharsis to take place through the experience of those kinds of music especially conducive to the arousal of intense emotion, rather than—and this is where the *narrower*, more technical sense of *êthikos* plays its role—music focused on the mimesis of stable, sober virtues of character.⁸⁴ Several other aspects of this passage might encourage us to seek connections with the treatment of tragedy in the *Poetics*, though all of them involve problems of interpretation: first, the fact that catharsis is linked with types of melody classed as *praktika* ('expressive of action', 'action-oriented') and *enthousiastika* ('expressive of thrilling emotion'), both of which have potential relevance to tragedy, even if Aristotle gives no indication of how they might be put to use in the genre; secondly, the fact that pity and fear come to Aristotle's mind, alongside *enthousiasmos*, as examples of potent emotions pertinent to catharsis at 1342a7 and 12 (though he is thinking here of emotions outside not inside the theatre); finally, the fact that Aristotle's train of thought explicitly encompasses 'theatrical' settings at 1342a18–28.⁸⁵

But just how much can we legitimately transfer from the idea of musical catharsis in its own right to the interpretation of tragic catharsis, which the *Poetics*, after all, gives us no reason to tie closely to the musical element in tragic theatre? I have already indicated the most basic reasons for accepting some degree of parallelism or comparability between musical and tragic catharsis. The two psychological phenomena might even presumably overlap, to the extent that the

⁸⁴ See esp. Aristotle's comments on the Dorian mode at 8.5, 1340b3–4, 8.7, 1342b12–17.

⁸⁵ This last passage raises vexed issues *vis-à-vis* catharsis; it is hard to be sure about the sequence of thought at 1342a15–16, where the MSS ascribe 'harmless pleasure' to 'cathartic melodies': scholars who favour emendation of 'cathartic' to 'action-related' (*καθαρτικά* to *πρακτικά*) include Susemihl and Hicks 1894: 611–12, Barker 1984: 180, Schütrumpf 2005: 668–9, the latter documenting other views; cf. Donini 2004: 61–2, Janko 2011: 519. Interpretative difficulty is compounded by the fact that whatever Aristotle means about banausic audience-members in this passage, there are also educated spectators (1342a18–19) but he does not comment on their experience of the music in question. For the pity and fear of 1342a7, 12, see n. 88 below.

use of 'cathartic melodies' in a tragic performance could be harnessed to a play's cumulative arousal of pity and fear.⁸⁶ The relationship between them remains complex, however, in ways I now want to explore further. One fundamental reservation, often noted, is that in the case of music Aristotle distinguishes between different kinds, or perhaps degrees, of catharsis, one of which is conceived of as treatment (through the use of special 'sacred melodies') for at least a quasi-pathological condition, the other as 'normal' in the sense of available in some degree to everyone (*Pol.* 8.7, 1342a14). A distinction of this type cannot apply to tragedy: there was no group of theatrical spectators who were actively seeking a cure for a psychological malaise. It was an error on the part of Bernays to ignore that difference, an error which allowed him to reduce both musical and tragic catharsis to a cure for pathological conditions. Bernays's mistake can be pinpointed very precisely. At *Pol.* 1342a12–13 Aristotle draws an explicit contrast between those with an extreme susceptibility or morbidly uncontrollable tendency to certain emotions (*pathêtikoi*, the emotionally pathological⁸⁷) and 'other people'. The latter, whose condition is therefore *not* pathological, are expressly said to benefit from 'some catharsis' (or 'catharsis of a kind', *τινα κάθαρσιν*).

The consequence of Bernays's erasure of this distinction was a radical distortion of Aristotle's conception of tragedy. Throughout the *Poetics* the arousal of pity and fear is posited as an integral, necessary part of the workings of the genre; it applies, both descriptively and normatively, to audiences in general. When, for instance, Aristotle specifies the design of the best kind of plot-structure in chapter 13, he ties the arousal of pity and fear (pity for one whose misfortune is undeserved, fear for one who is 'like (us)', 1453a3–7) to a psychology which he evidently takes to belong to normal spectators, not to the extreme or exceptional susceptibilities of a minority. To translate Aristotle's view of the essential emotional effect of tragedy on its audiences into a matter of therapy for the mentally oppressed or unbalanced is a travesty of the *Poetics*.

⁸⁶ An obvious example: Aristotle would presumably expect music to contribute to the emotional effect of the lyric exchange between the blinded Oedipus and the chorus in the climactic passage at *Soph. OT* 1313–68 (and probably also the preceding anapaests, 1297–1312). Sifakis (2001: ch. 4) offers interesting reflections on the relevance of music to Aristotle's conception of tragedy in general.

⁸⁷ With this use of *pathêtikos* contrast *Eth. Nic.* 2.5, 1105b24, where the adj. denotes the capacity to feel emotions *tout court*.

Only a minority of people, because of a pathological susceptibility, will be totally 'possessed by' or 'in the grip of' (κατοκώχιοι, 1342a8) a frenzied state of *enthousiasmos* when listening to 'sacred melodies'; and something comparable applies, still in relation to highly emotional music (and *not*, contrary to Bernays's claim, to the general experience of tragedy), where those with a quasi-pathological tendency to pity and fear are concerned.⁸⁸ But Aristotle explicitly extrapolates from this phenomenon to a much more widespread, 'normal' emotional tendency. When, moreover, he first mentions musical catharsis at 1341a23 (without explanation, it should be noticed: see below), he implies that it is something regularly available to musical audiences on the occasions in question. He is presumably alluding here to a cathartic effect accessible to more than the pathologically disordered; it would be culturally baffling if he were suggesting that the aulos should be restricted to occasions aimed exclusively at the latter. It must be this general model of musical catharsis which supplies the right parallel to tragic catharsis. In this respect the mention of pity and fear at 1342a7, 12, does form a bridge in Aristotle's thinking: while not a direct reference to tragedy or tragic spectators, it brings into the picture emotions to which (virtually) all souls are susceptible and whose centrality to the experience of tragedy was standardly recognized before Aristotle.⁸⁹

Politics 8 underscores the advisability of trying to break away from the dichotomy imposed by the long-standing debate between rival conceptions of catharsis as *either* medical ('purgative') or ritual ('purificatory').⁹⁰ The conceptual nuances in Aristotle's position need to be registered with care. The discussion of music in *Politics* 8 cites

⁸⁸ *Pol.* 8.7, 1342a11–12 implies that those with an acute susceptibility to 'pity' and 'fear' find a kind of cure in intensely emotional music (possibly including the 'sacred melodies'): cf. Susemihl and Hicks 1894: 609, Newman 1887–1902: iii. 565, Kraut 1997: 210. *Contra* Bernays 1880: 14, 23, these are not tragic spectators, nor even really like them. ἐλεήμων, lit. 'given to pity', probably here denotes uncontrolled tearfulness (cf. [Arist.] *Phgn.* 3.808a32) rather than a compassionate disposition; the term is not used in *Rh.* 2.8's account of normal pity. Equally, φοβητικός (again, the adj. is absent from *Rh.* 2.5, though cf. προφοβητικός at 2.13, 1389b30) indicates an obsessive, neurotic fearfulness for oneself, not the kind of imaginative fear for a character in a play meant at *Poet.* 13.1453a5–6. For further criticism of Bernays, cf. Janko 1984: 139–42.

⁸⁹ Cf. n. 122 below.

⁹⁰ For recent work on Greek conceptions of religious and medical catharsis in their own right, see Hoessly (2001) and several of the contributions to Vöhler and Seidensticker (2007).

an extreme cathartic process (applying to those ‘possessed by’ or ‘in the grip of’ certain emotions, 1342a8) from a sphere which most Greeks, as the reference to ‘sacred melodies’ (ἱερῶν μελῶν) intimates, would have considered a case of religious ritual. It then in turn gives a quasi-medical account of the psychological effect of such rituals (it is ‘as if’, ὥσπερ, those in question receive treatment for their emotional condition, 1342a10) but not—an important distinction—of their mechanism. The discussion does not strictly categorize the pathological variety of catharsis, still less the kind which it goes on to posit for ‘everyone’ (1342a14), in terms either of ritual or of medicine, but in those of a generalized model of psychological norms and extremes. The metaphor of catharsis has both religious and therapeutic associations; it is not, however, *reducible* to either. As a result, attempts to turn interpretation of tragic catharsis into a choice between purgation and purification are conceptually unproductive. We shall encounter a further reason for this view in due course.

Aristotle’s assumptions about musical catharsis can also shed some indirect light on the difficult question of the relationship of tragic catharsis to tragic pleasure. In the *Politics* musical catharsis is said to be part of a compound process which involves or is accompanied by pleasure, but it is not clear that catharsis is identified with this pleasure. In fact, the case for *not* making that identification is linguistically strong: Aristotle says that ‘all obtain some [or a kind of] catharsis and a pleasurable alleviation’ (πᾶσι γίγνεσθαι τινα κάθαρσιν καὶ κομφίζεσθαι μεθ’ ἡδονῆς, 1342a14–15), attaching the sense of pleasure most closely to the idea of ‘alleviation’ or ‘lightening’. Unless we take the καί (‘and’) in that clause to be explanatory (making the second phrase a gloss on catharsis—‘some catharsis, that is to say a pleasurable alleviation’: an option for which I see no compelling argument),⁹¹ the elements of catharsis and pleasure stand as distinct, though nonetheless seemingly intertwined, components of the experience in question.

While our attention is on that sentence, it is worth considering an additional point about Aristotle’s choice of language. In a passage of the *Ethics* generally neglected by commentators on the *Politics*, Aristotle uses the same verb (κομφίζεσθαι) for the alleviation of emotional

⁹¹ The passage is translated that way by Hubbard 1972: 133.

pain or distress (*λυπεῖσθαι*) in cases where those suffering misfortune derive support from their friends' sympathy (or 'sharing of their pain', *συναλγείν*).⁹² Aristotle briefly and inconclusively ponders alternative explanations for such 'alleviation': do one's friends share and therefore reduce the burden, in some sense, or does the pleasure of their presence itself lessen the pain of misfortune? What is clear is that the sense of alleviation must be the result of a process that works through the sufferers' awareness of their circumstances: people do not find their distress automatically eased; their emotional state is modified because of their conscious perception and appreciation of their friends' compassion. This comparison reinforces the possibility that in the case of musical, and even more so in that of tragic, catharsis an element of mental 'alleviation' need not be divorced from the conscious, cognitive level at which emotions operate, even if it may simultaneously have a strongly physiological substrate.⁹³ The exact reasons for such a cognitively mediated change will, it goes without saying, be very different in the case of responses to mimetic artworks from those which underlie the reactions of the distressed to their friends' sympathy.

In their related but different ways, both the *Politics*' reference to the combination of musical catharsis with pleasurable alleviation and the passage from the *Ethics* just adduced guide us towards the thought that tragic catharsis can plausibly be connected to the *transformation* of normally painful emotions (pity and fear) into a rewarding and gratifying experience (the special pleasure of tragedy). But even after making that inference, it is important to recognize that tragic catharsis and tragic pleasure might still be conceptually distinct, though causally (and even phenomenologically) related. A number of scholars have tried to make a connection between catharsis and the only reference to painful emotions which occurs in the *Poetics* before the definition of tragedy. That reference is found in chapter 4's account of the conversion of painful subjects into sources of contemplative, 'aesthetic' pleasure (1448b9–12), a transformation explained in terms

⁹² *Eth. Nic.* 9.11, 1171a29–34 (*κουφίζονται* twice); for the psychological idea, but without this verb, cf. *Men. frs.* 862–5. In Timocles fr. 6.14 (cf. nn. 39, 79 above), watching tragedy 'alleviates' (*κουφίζειν*) the spectators' distress about their own sufferings; this is conjoined with the effect of taking the mind 'out of itself' (*ψυχαγωγείν*, 6).

⁹³ As suggested by e.g. *Gen. an.* 1.18, 725b9, 4.6, 775b13, with the passages from [Arist.] *Probl.* cited by Susemihl and Hicks 1894: 611 on *κουφίζεσθαι*.

of the cognitive process of learning/understanding (*μανθάνειν*) which Aristotle takes to inform the experience of mimetic art.

To make such a connection attractive, two premises are required. The first is that the channelling of emotions through 'aesthetic' experience (in Aristotelian terms, the imaginatively engaged contemplation of mimetic objects, *mimēmata*—whether visual, musical, or poetic works/performances) makes a difference to the dynamics of those emotions, freeing them, at least to some extent (perhaps not altogether), from the painfulness of their real-life occurrences. The second is that within the framework of these same experiences there is an interaction between the audience's cognitive and emotional reactions. *Poetics* 4 explains, concisely and rudimentarily (but with implicit scope for further development of the point), that we can enjoy viewing otherwise painful objects when they are effectively depicted in (visual) art, because we are able in this context to understand them and learn from them in ways that (for most people) would not be possible under the exigencies of real-world situations. The aesthetic context creates special cognitive conditions of contemplation, and has corresponding consequences for the viewer's emotional responses.⁹⁴ At the same time, *Politics* 8.5 (1340a23–8) states unambiguously that there is significant *continuity* between contemplation of mimetic objects and of equivalent objects of experience in the world at large. So mimetic representations do not break all connection with their audiences' normal responses to reality. They draw on the possibility of those responses but also uncouple them from the pressures and constraints of life itself, transforming them into a source of rich pleasure in the contents of a mimetic 'representation of life'.⁹⁵

On Aristotle's model of tragedy, as interpreted earlier in this chapter, spectators of the finest plays are induced, at supreme moments of *ekplêxis*, to experience strong surges of pity and (vicarious or

⁹⁴ See Belfiore 1992: 238–46 on this point, with Halliwell 2002a: 179–82 for a range of further views. Though different from mine, Lear (1988) gives a reading of catharsis which integrates the idea of special aesthetic conditions (qua 'safe environment') for emotional experience (esp. 315–16, 325).

⁹⁵ See extensive analysis of this model of the experience of mimetic art in Halliwell (2001, 2002a: chs. 5–8). Belfiore (1992: 227–9) denies that tragedy transforms painful emotions into a source of pleasure, but her arguments do not meet the full force of the unqualified statement at *Poet.* 14.1453b11–12 (nn. 97–8 below).

‘sympathetic’) fear.⁹⁶ The basic emotions concerned are themselves possible in the real world outside the theatre, where, however, opportunities for sympathetic fear may be limited. But tragedy elicits these emotions through artfully constructed and integrated plots; it focuses them on fictively elaborated characters and situations in a way that allows a contemplative-cum-aesthetic response in which the normal painfulness of both pity and fear are (substantially) converted into a special kind of pleasure. That conversion is directly signalled by Aristotle’s definition of the ‘peculiar’, appropriate pleasure of tragedy at *Poetics* 14.1453b12: his formulation, ‘the pleasure arising from pity and fear through mimesis’, exploits a resource of Greek word-order (with the two qualifying phrases enclosed between article and noun: literally, ‘the-from-pity-and-fear-through-mimesis-pleasure’)⁹⁷ to accentuate the distinctive aesthetic concentration, as well as the paradoxical character, of the experience.

No ethically decent person would take *direct* pleasure in feeling pity (or fear) at real-world objects, since that would require one to be pleased by the existence of objects conducive to those emotions, objects which are by definition ‘evils’. Equally, while one might subsequently say one had learnt something from events that had aroused real-life pity and fear (or from one’s own emotional reactions to them), one could not, in Aristotelian terms, trace the emotions themselves back to the pleasure of learning, as *Poetics* 4 does for the experience of mimetic art. Yet every suitably attuned person, Aristotle supposes, is capable of finding deep pleasure in tragic pity and fear. Moreover, the use of the preposition ἀπό (‘from’) in the definition of tragedy’s special pleasure (1453b12, quoted above) shows that pity and fear, as experienced in this context, are themselves at least the proximate source of the pleasure.⁹⁸ All this enables us to see that there

⁹⁶ See Halliwell (1998: 176–7, 2002a: 216–17) for the (minority) view of tragic fear as primarily ‘sympathetic’, not self-regarding; cf. Woodruff 2009a: 304–5. I differ on several points from Konstan 2006: 211–14; cf. Konstan 2005a.

⁹⁷ τὴν ἀπο ἐλέου καὶ φόβου διὰ μιμήσεως... ἡδονήν: for other cases of such enclosing word-order, see e.g. *Top.* 1.15, 106a37, *Eth. Eud.* 1.5, 1216a30. Heath 1996: 22 (‘should produce the pleasure which comes from pity and fear, and should do so by means of imitation’) misses the point of the phrasing and distorts Aristotle’s thought twice over. Cf. Else 1957: 410–11.

⁹⁸ Compare, most appositely, not only the first part of this same sentence of the *Poetics* (ἡδονὴν ἀπὸ τραγωδίας, 1453b11) but also the reference at 13.1453a35–6 to the pleasure provided by tragedy (ἡ ἀπὸ τραγωδίας ἡδονή). For this use of ἀπό, cf. e.g. *Eth. Nic.* 1130b4, 1153a7, 1173b26, 1175b2.

must be a connection between, first, the model of aesthetic pleasure arising from contemplation of 'painful' objects, as set out in *Poetics* 4; second, the catharsis of pity and fear included in chapter 6's definition; and, third, the proper or special pleasure of tragedy as defined in chapter 14. What remains to some degree obscure is the nature of that connection.⁹⁹

One option, taken by many scholars, is simply to *identify* catharsis with the special pleasure of tragedy.¹⁰⁰ After all, the definition of tragic pleasure at 1453b10–12 evidently echoes chapter 6's definition of the genre itself, though the latter speaks of catharsis and not of pleasure (the treatise's first direct reference to tragic pleasure does not in fact occur until 13.1453a35–6). Whether we can accept that identification depends, I think, on two considerations: first, on the exact wording of the two definitions in question, one of the genre and the other of its special pleasure; secondly, on Aristotle's larger account of the relationship between pleasures and the activities that generate them. On the first score, it might be significant that in chapter 6 the emotions of pity and fear are the means or agency (*διὰ* plus the genitive, 1449b27) of the cathartic process—standing in the same relation to catharsis, that is, as mimesis does to tragic pleasure in chapter 14 (*διὰ μιμήσεως*, 1453b12). At the same time, the subject of the transitive participle *περαίνουσα* in chapter 6's definition is tragedy itself: it is tragedy, qua mimesis of a certain kind of action, which 'accomplishes' or 'carries through' the catharsis of pity and fear (see below for more on the sense of this verb). So the two definitions specify, in linguistically different but overlapping ways, mimetic representation and the audience's emotional response to it as joint conditions of catharsis and tragic pleasure.

⁹⁹ It is a fault in Golden's reading of catharsis, e.g. Golden 1992: ch. 2 (one of many formulations), that while rightly perceiving a link with the argument of *Poet.* 4 he makes catharsis primarily intellectual, even though both the definition of tragedy and the treatment of musical catharsis in *Pol.* 8 (dismissed by Golden) show catharsis to be strongly emotional; cf. Nussbaum 1996: 388–90. Despite my repudiation of his views in Halliwell 1986: 354–5, Golden 1998: 107 enlists me as an *adherent* of his own 'clarification' school of interpretation! Depew 2007: 149 n. 27 makes the same error. Silk 1995: 183 calls Golden's position 'no more than a historical curiosity'.

¹⁰⁰ See e.g. Dupont-Roc and Lallot 1980: 188–93, though an overliteral understanding of *Poet.* 1453b13–14 leads them to conflate the spectators' pity and fear with the 'éléments de l'histoire' that cause them. Heath (2001: 12) resists the identification of catharsis and tragic pleasure, but for reasons I cannot wholly share. For another denial, see Rostagni 1955: 114.

We must also reckon, on the other hand, with the 'homoeopathic' implication of the catharsis clause. I use that term not in the sense that a particular kind of medical model is being implicitly invoked (Aristotle seems in any case to have regarded medical cures as allopathic, not homoeopathic), only in the sense that the emotions are represented, in Twining's phrase, as 'both the means and the object' of the process.¹⁰¹ This appears to fix a difference between catharsis and tragic pleasure: catharsis is something that modifies the audience's emotions (and/or its emotional dispositions) *through* the occurrent emotional experience itself; but the pleasure defined in chapter 14 arises *from* this same emotional experience without, so far as Aristotle's wording goes, doubling back and affecting the emotions themselves. Furthermore, we recall that in *Politics* 8 (1342a14–15) Aristotle speaks of 'a certain catharsis and a pleasurable alleviation' (τινα κάθαρσιν καὶ κουφίζεσθαι μεθ' ἡδονῆς), a phrasing which I have argued is best taken to mark out catharsis and pleasure as conceptually distinct, though perhaps phenomenologically intertwined, aspects of a complex process. This remains a clear option in the *Poetics* too. It rests, in the final analysis, on the fact that Aristotle speaks separately and sufficiently differently of catharsis and pleasure, when he could so easily have told us if he took them to be one and the same thing.

We can take the argument one step further by seeking external help from some of Aristotle's remarks on pleasure in the last book of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (10.4–5). There he not only makes a consistent conceptual distinction between activities (ἐνέργειαι) and the pleasures that 'complete' (τελείουν) them, but actually asserts this distinction while acknowledging that activities and their pleasures are so closely intertwined that they may seem (i.e. in practice, to those who experience them) not to be separable (1175a19–20, cf. 1175a29–30). At 1175a30–6 (where one of his examples happens to be that of listening to music¹⁰²) Aristotle explains that the proper pleasure of an activity intensifies or enhances it (συναύξειν); at 1175b13–15 that the proper pleasure of an activity makes the exercise of it better and more

¹⁰¹ Twining 1789: 233, cf. 237.

¹⁰² He also refers to watching drama in the same context, 1175b11–13, though for a rather wry illustration of his point. As for 1175b3–6, where the sound of an aulos distracts someone from conversation or discussion, it is bizarre to suppose, with Zierl 1994: 90 n. 270 (cf. 76), that this has any bearing on the contrast between catharsis and *mathêsis* at *Pol.* 1341a23–4.

precise; and at 1175b21–2 that a proper pleasure (or pain) is one that arises in, or belongs to, its activity in virtue of the activity itself (i.e. is an intrinsic pleasure). These passages, with their fuller context in *Nicomachean Ethics* 10, suggest a persuasive reason for stopping short of identifying tragic catharsis with the proper pleasure of tragedy. It is this: the Aristotelian concept of a proper or special pleasure (*οἰκεία ἡδονή*) is surely so much more basic and widely instantiated than that of catharsis. Every distinct activity has its proper pleasure; not every activity induces catharsis. Here we can return to the evidence of *Politics* 8, which hardly creates the impression that when Aristotle refers to musical catharsis he is doing no more than using a synonym of the appropriate or proper pleasure provided by the relevant kind of music in each case.

This leaves us, I think, with the reasonable inference that tragic catharsis is something additional, though no doubt intimately related, to the pleasure of tragedy. One way in which catharsis can be construed as additional to pleasure is in virtue of being a *benefit* (*ὠφέλεια*), as *Politics* 8 directly indicates in the case of music (1341b36–8). Of course, in some contexts pleasure might itself be deemed a ‘benefit’, but the fact remains that both in the *Poetics* and in *Politics* 8 Aristotle speaks separately of the pleasure(s) and the catharsis arising from certain kinds of mimetic art.¹⁰³ Catharsis, this suggests, is not just the conversion and integration of otherwise painful emotions into the pleasurable experience of mimetic art: it is the psychological benefit accruing from this conversion. Two reasons can be adduced to support the contention that it is mistaken to suppose, with Bernays and others, that such a benefit could be restricted to a mere discharge or evacuation of emotional energy. One is that the general concept of catharsis (qua ‘cleaning’ or ‘cleansing’) inherently covers both the removal of an excess/impurity/defect *and* the resulting condition of (improved) purity or refinement.¹⁰⁴ The other, deeper reason why tragic catharsis must be more than evacuative involves something largely suppressed by proponents of a ‘pathological’ reading of catharsis: the importance of emotions in Aristotle’s moral psychology.

¹⁰³ For the conceptual separation of pleasure and benefit see e.g. *Eth. Nic.* 8.6, 1158b3, 8.8, 1159b11–12 (both on friendship); cf. *Pl. Resp.* 10.607d–e, with ch. 6, 310–20, on the issue of poetry’s putative ‘benefit’.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. *Pl. Resp.* 8.567c, *Soph.* 226d for explicit statements of this point.

Feeling emotions in the right way towards the right things is an intrinsically ethical issue within Aristotelian philosophy. This is why, for instance (and with obvious pertinence to the experience of tragedy), the *Rhetoric* states (2.9, 1386b9–14) that pity for the undeserved misfortune of others, or, equally, indignation at their undeserved success, is a mark of good character (*ἡθους χρηστοῦ*). The emotions or passions, with their concomitant feelings of pleasure or pain, are a factor in virtue of character because they embody ethically evaluative responses to circumstances and events (real or imagined): they are, as the *Rhetoric* again puts it, ‘all those feelings which change and make a difference to people’s judgements and are accompanied by pain or pleasure’.¹⁰⁵ In the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle explains that ethical virtues are concerned with pleasures and pains in part because they are concerned with actions and emotions, adding that the latter are all accompanied by pleasures and pains. Excellence of character can roughly be regarded as a matter of acting well in respect of pleasure and pain, which includes feeling emotions correctly: virtuous dispositions are not themselves emotions, but settled habits with regard to the emotions.¹⁰⁶ It is because the emotions are so basic to the system of Aristotelian moral psychology that ethical education can be presented, in somewhat Platonic fashion, as essentially a training in feeling pleasures and pains correctly.¹⁰⁷ Now, it is this educational tenet which *Politics* 8 employs in requiring that the young should learn to ‘take pleasure rightly’ (*ὀρθῶς*

¹⁰⁵ *Rh.* 2.1, 1378a19–20, ἔστι δὲ τὰ πάθη δι’ ὅσα μεταβάλλοντες διαφέρουσι πρὸς τὰς κρίσεις, οἷς ἔπεται λύπη καὶ ἡδονή. Extensive discussion in Rapp 2002: ii. 540–83; cf. Cope 1877: ii. 6–7. Emotions, for Aristotle, involve a kind of simultaneity of bodily and mental states: e.g. *De an.* 1.1, 403a16–19; cf. Belfiore 1992: 181–9, Rapp 2007: 163–6.

¹⁰⁶ The basic principles of this ethical psychology are stated at *Eth. Nic.* 2.3, 1104b3–1105a1, 2.5, 1105b19–1106a6, 2.6, 1106b16–28, 2.7, 1108a30–b6, 7.11, 1152b4–6, 10.1, 1172a19–27, 10.8, 1178a9–22, *Eth. Eud.* 2.1–2, 1220a34–b20. Since pity is one of the basic passions (listed as such at *Eth. Nic.* 2.5, 1105b23–5, 2.6, 1106b19; cf. *De an.* 1.1, 403a17) and required for moral understanding in general (cf. *Eth. Nic.* 3.1, 1109b32, 1111a1, 3.5, 1114a27), and since feeling the passions correctly is part of virtue, the statement of Schütrumpf 2005: 664 that the *Ethics* shows feeling pity in the right way to be ‘irrelevant’ to Aristotelian virtue is startlingly dogmatic, as well as flatly contradicting *Rh.* 2.9, 1386b9–14 (cited in my text above). The lack of a specific virtue relating to pity, stressed by Schütrumpf 1970: 107 n. 6, does not dislodge the larger point.

¹⁰⁷ *Eth. Nic.* 2.3, 1104b11–13 (with acknowledgement to Plato), 10.1, 1172a20–1; further references in Schütrumpf 2005: 601.

χαίρειν) in certain sorts of music—not, however, directly *à propos* the melodies technically called *êthika*, but in connection with the general *êthos*-affecting and ‘soul-changing’ power of music, not least the ‘melodies of Olympus’ (later linked to catharsis).¹⁰⁸ My argument here comes round full circle to the earlier claim that in *Politics* 8 we have illuminating evidence for how the experience of music—and, by extrapolation, all forms of mimetic art—can count as ‘ethical’ on more than one level. Emotional responses to musical mimesis activate and contribute to the workings of character, and that principle must embrace the process(es) of musical catharsis, in which certain emotions are roused to a high pitch or special intensity.

For these same fundamental reasons, tragic catharsis too, where appropriately sensitive audiences are concerned,¹⁰⁹ should occupy a place within the framework of Aristotle’s moral psychology. If the *Poetics* does not dwell on the specifically moral dimension of tragic experience, that is not because Aristotle does not think such a dimension exists; his entire psychology of the passions commits him to supposing that it must.¹¹⁰ It is because his theory is not moralistically slanted. Sharp modern demarcations between the moral and the aesthetic are not at home in this setting.¹¹¹ Consider a claim like the following: ‘in the *Poetics* we are told in so many words that tragedy creates a specific aesthetic enjoyment, a pleasure peculiar to itself: about its moral or educational influence we learn nothing’.¹¹² The phrase ‘in so many words’ disguises a question-begging move;

¹⁰⁸ 1340a14–28; cf. 1339a24–5, 1339b1, 1340b39. See 238–42 above.

¹⁰⁹ Aristotle does not take all spectators/audiences to be psychologically uniform; cf. n. 85 above. The *Poetics* refers to audience responses both positively and negatively; see esp. 13.1453a26–34 for both in rapid succession. But the definition of tragedy contains a normative assumption about audience emotions.

¹¹⁰ Silk (1995: 183) says of my earlier interpretation of catharsis: ‘it is a highly, indeed ingeniously, Aristotelian interpretation . . . ; but *there is no reason* to take it as Aristotle’s meaning’ (my emphasis); cf. Ford 1995: 113. But this generates the hermeneutic absurdity that being ‘Aristotelian’ (i.e. in tune with Aristotle’s system of thought as a whole) is not a ‘reason’ in favour of a particular interpretation of an Aristotelian text!

¹¹¹ *Poet.* 25.1460b13–15, properly understood, does not underwrite a strong distinction of this kind: see 211, 216–19 above, and cf. Halliwell 2003e: 181–2.

¹¹² Hicks’s note in Susemihl and Hicks 1894: 651–2. Hicks (ibid. 607, 639) translates διαγωγή as ‘aesthetic enjoyment’ at *Pol.* 1341b40; also as ‘the highest rational enjoyment’ (638). Susemihl and (mostly) Hicks’s long note on catharsis (641–56) manages to avoid mentioning the general ethical importance of the emotions in Aristotelian psychology. But cf. Susemihl’s note on 622, stating that the cathartic and moral effects of music ‘must have much in common’.

the term 'aesthetic', reinforced by 'peculiar to itself', is allowed to suggest something completely self-contained, utterly disconnected from the ethical. But that suggestion is absent from Aristotle's view that tragedy produces its own, 'peculiar' pleasure. Tragic pleasure is 'peculiar' to the genre in the sense of being proper and integral to it (*οἰκεῖος*). This does not imply that the experience of tragedy is hermetically sealed from the experience of life as a whole. On the contrary, tragic pleasure is produced by works which dramatize 'action and life' (6.1450a16–17). It must therefore entail the interplay between responses to mimetic art and to 'life' which Aristotle posits at *Politics* 8.5, 1340a23–8 (see 249 above); and it must do so, at its core, by eliciting pity and fear, whose connections with ethical appraisals of human action and suffering are set out in detail in book 2 of the *Rhetoric* and clearly signalled in the *Ethics*.¹¹³ The psychology of tragic pleasure can be said to constitute, in the sum of its parts, a distinctively 'aesthetic' experience, if by that we mean an experience which takes the form of focused contemplation (*theôria*) of, and heightened emotional responsiveness to, artistic representations. But it is nonetheless, at root, a matter of aesthetic-cum-moral psychology, in which the audience's capacity for 'emotional understanding' is brought to bear on imaginative enactments of possible human realities.

A related conclusion holds good for tragic catharsis itself, whether one identifies catharsis directly with the 'peculiar pleasure' of the genre, or treats it, as I have argued, as a supervenient 'benefit' or value of the total experience, including the conversion of painful into pleasurable emotions. In his definition of the genre Aristotle says that tragedy brings about or effects (*περαίνειν*) catharsis. The verb is best understood here, I propose, as denoting an entire, cumulative process, not just its end-point.¹¹⁴ As it happens, this is borne out by the use of

¹¹³ For the relevance of pity to ethical understanding and judgement, see the references in n. 106 above. Nussbaum (2001: 304–27) offers a neo-Aristotelian account of the cognitive conditions of pity; cf. Halliwell 2002a: 207–30.

¹¹⁴ This reading is compatible with the account of musical catharsis in *Pol.* 8. Susemihl's note on 1342a9, Susemihl and Hicks 1894: 610, begs the question by translating *χρήσονται* as 'when they have used the melody' (my emphasis); likewise Newman 1887–1902: iii. 563. This is not a necessary implication of the aorist aspect of the subjunctive (nor of the participle *τυχόντας* later in the sentence); note the present participle *καθισταμένους*, 1342a10. *χρήσονται* is compatible with the inference that the process begins in the course of hearing the music, though it is obviously

the same verb in the very next sentence of the *Poetics*, at 1449b30 (cf. 1459b27), where different parts of tragedy are said to be presented, executed, or even performed (*περαίνεσθαι*) either in spoken verse or in song: the idea of simply reaching an end-point or completion would clearly make no sense here.¹¹⁵ Most modern interpreters, however, have taken the catharsis clause in the definition of tragedy to accentuate a final outcome, the state the audience is left in at the end of the play; Pierluigi Donini has gone even further by arguing that the verb *περαίνειν* may signify the 'crowning' and completion of a process started *outside* tragedy (in the prior experience of the audience).¹¹⁶ But the role of pity and fear in Aristotle's account of tragedy suggests that these emotions, while peaking at climactic points (above all, in the *peripeteia* and/or *anagnôrisis* of the complex plot) which Aristotle associates with *ekplêxis* (a gripping or stunning moment of impact: 229 above), are nonetheless integral to the totality of the experience. They emerge from, and help to define, a form of response in which the emotionally nuanced understanding of action and character is called for at every stage of a plot-structure.¹¹⁷

The contours, so to speak, of an audience's sense of pity and fear will depend on the precise shape of the action in an individual play. A 'simple' plot such as Euripides' *Trojan Women* or a 'pathos-centred' work like Sophocles' *Ajax* (cf. *Poetics* 18.1456a1) may call for these emotions directly from the outset, though the level of emotional intensity could still be expected to fluctuate with the unfolding of the action. A 'complex' plot, on the other hand, hinges by definition on crucial turning-points and therefore moments of maximum emotional impact, though these can occur at various positions, earlier or later, in a play. If catharsis is a psychological benefit accruing from the experience of a tragedy, it can hardly be an effect that is localized and

understood to bring about an observable result. Translators who take the point include Hubbard 1972: 133, Kraut 1997: 47, Gigon 1973: 261, Barker 1984: 180.

¹¹⁵ Antiphanes fr. 1.6 shows that *περαίνειν* could be used of dramatic recital; is this relevant to Ar. *Frogs* 1170?

¹¹⁶ Readings that stress an end-result include Ferrari 1999: 196–7, Sifakis 2001: 112, both equating catharsis with 'relief', Gallop 1999: 86–90 (construing it, more richly, as 'spiritual peace' or serenity). The extreme interpretation of *περαίνειν* in Donini (2004: 58–61) makes the presence of catharsis in the definition of tragedy puzzling; his view of the *Poetics* as a continuation of *Pol.* 8 was anticipated in the 16th cent. by Mazzoni.

¹¹⁷ Cf. Schmitt 2008: 492.

isolated at any one juncture of that experience. It should be more like a process which supervenes on and is brought about by the whole emotional pattern of the experience, a pattern in which being induced to feel pity and fear is, on Aristotle's terms, an exercise that necessarily impinges on the 'ethical' (i.e. character-related) capacities of tragedy's spectators.

It is important to add, as a rider to the case I have presented, that we do not have to exclude from this picture of tragic catharsis an element of 'alleviation' or 'lightening' (*κουφίζεσθαι*) of the kind said to accompany musical catharsis in the *Politics*.¹¹⁸ A feeling of release, of uninhibited psychological flow, both during and after strong surges of emotion, is a suitable adjunct to the type of aesthetic experience that Aristotle takes to generate catharsis in the tragic theatre (or even in the fully engaged 'reading' of a play).¹¹⁹ The operations of mimetic art, with the resources of representation and expression built into its culturally evolved forms, allow audiences special opportunities for closely focused 'contemplation' (*theôria*) of imagined possibilities of human life. Such experience, free from the obstacles, partialities, and disorder which often cloud contingent social experience, makes possible both a quasi-philosophical understanding of 'universals' (embodied in a plot's intelligible structure of causality) and, in alignment with that understanding, a concentrated emotional receptiveness.¹²⁰ Catharsis, a term probably borrowed from others' usage (see below), is Aristotle's description for the benefit that is felt in and through the heightened arousal of the emotions by artistic simulations of the human world. There is nothing to stop such experience being, in Aristotle's terms, both emotionally fulfilling in its own right and a sign that the ethical capacities of tragedy's audience are being well

¹¹⁸ Collingwood (1938: 110) uses the term 'lightening' for the feeling of rightness and clarity involved in all effective emotional expression. He makes a passing comparison with catharsis, but falls back on a 'discharge' (i.e. purgation) view of the latter; cf. *ibid.* 51.

¹¹⁹ Lucas (1968: 281–2 n. 3) illicitly infers from *Pol.* 8 that 'mass emotion' is a necessary condition of tragic catharsis and that the latter could therefore 'hardly occur' in the reading (aloud) of a play. But Aristotle stresses that the hearer (sc. of a reading) can 'shudder' (with fear) and feel pity, even without seeing a performance: *Poet.* 14.1453b4–6 (n. 50 above); cf. 26.1462a17–18 for the 'vividness' (i.e. imaginative power) which tragedy can possess even in reading (but with n. 42 above).

¹²⁰ The criterion of 'concentration' is applied to poetic pleasure at *Poet.* 26.1462a18–b3; by implication it must apply to the emotional-cum-cognitive basis of that pleasure.

exercised. But if we reduce tragic catharsis to a mere end-result of evacuative 'relief', we foist onto the *Poetics* a curiously insubstantial, inessential clause for the last part of the definition of the genre.

A larger perspective on catharsis than I have undertaken here would need to take account of both the ancestry and the afterlife of Aristotle's concept.¹²¹ Whatever else we may choose to believe about it, catharsis was part of Aristotle's response to an old Greek debate about the emotional power of music and poetry, not least the paradoxical power of such arts to offer the mind a deep reward for the contemplation of human suffering. Just as the *Poetics*' formula of 'pity and fear' for the quintessential tragic emotions reflects a broader current of thought that we glimpse in both Gorgias and Plato,¹²² and just as Aristotle sees no need to offer direct explanation for applying the verb *ψυχάγωγεῖν* (to 'conjure' the soul) to tragedy's most penetrating effects on its audience (223–6 above), so the idea of catharsis can be regarded as an extension of an older Greek tradition of ideas about the 'soul-magic' and 'soul-medicine' of poetry and music. That tradition includes Homeric ideas of poetic 'entrancement' and 'bewitchment'; the assuagement of the passions by music (a practice ascribed to Terpander and to some Pythagoreans); a specifically Pythagorean notion of musical catharsis ('the Pythagoreans used medicine for catharsis of the body, music for that of the soul', so Aristoxenus tells us); Gorgias' adaptation of the language of both medicine and magic for his highly wrought account of the power of *logos*; and, last but not least, a whole variety of Platonic references to the psychological seductions of verbal or musical art.¹²³

¹²¹ On its afterlife in antiquity, see e.g. Sorabji 2000: 288–300, but with some debatable assumptions about Aristotle's own position. Highland (2005) detects oblique traces of Aristotle's concept in Theophrastus' use of cathartic vocabulary for botanical pruning (as a way of moderating and promoting well-formed growth). For the creative transformation of Aristotle's idea in modern times, see Vöhler and Linck (2009).

¹²² See Gorg. (*Helen*) B11.8–9 DK, Pl. *Ion* 535b–e, *Phdr.* 268c; for other hints of the same model of tragic emotions in the classical period (a model with partially Homeric ancestry) see Halliwell 2002a: 218 n. 33 (with 212–14), Cerri 2007: 78–95; cf. Ch. 6 n. 19. The rather lofty putdown of Aristotle in Williams (2006: 56) appears to overlook this important cultural point; cf. Williams 1993: 231 n. 35 for his condescension towards the *Poetics* (and, I think, some confusion about the sense of *τραγικώτατος* at *Poet.* 13.1453a29).

¹²³ For Homeric bewitchment, see Ch. 2, 47–53. Musical assuagement of passions: Terpander test. 9 Campbell (1988), with Chamaeleon fr. 4 Wehrli (1969), *apud* Athen. 623F–4A, on the Pythagorean Cleinias of Tarentum. Aristoxenus on Pythagoreans and

Pythagorean and Platonic usage, in particular, makes it doubtful whether we should claim, as Bernays did (without discussion), that Aristotle himself invented, as opposed to adapted, the use of 'catharsis' as a technical term of aesthetics. I mentioned earlier that while in *Politics* 8 Aristotle promises further clarification of the term at 1341b38–40, this is at its second occurrence; when he uses it for the first time, at 1341a23, it passes without special comment. While, moreover, Aristotle can envisage clarifying the term in a discussion of poetry, he feels able to use it in the immediate context 'plainly' or 'without qualification' (ἀπλῶς, 1341b39): that is, in a way which he must have expected to make reasonable sense to his students. Far from being indispensable, as Bernays alleged, the further explanation can wait for another occasion.¹²⁴ Even without such explanation, Aristotle could count on his students to appreciate the resonance of the vocabulary of catharsis within the larger matrix of Greek sensibilities regarding the soul-transforming, 'ecstatic' realm of musico-poetic experience. He would have expected them to recognize that he was fully attuned and open to the emotional implications of such sensibilities. But he would also have expected them to appreciate how his own philosophical psychology required the harmonization of emotion with ethical judgement and understanding. In the *Poetics*' theory of tragedy, catharsis is the name Aristotle gives to the achievement of that aim in an experience which fuses the aesthetic and the moral.

APPENDIX: IS THE CATHARSIS CLAUSE IN THE *POETICS* AN INTERPOLATION?

Two scholars, Scott (2003) and Veloso (2007), have recently argued that the reference to catharsis in the *Poetics*' definition of tragedy involves a textual

music: fr. 26 Wehrli (1967); but older reconstructions of Aristotle's relationship to the Pythagorean idea of catharsis, e.g. Boyancé 1937: 185–99, Rostagni 1955: 135–61, are overconfident. On Gorgias and the power of *logos*, see Ch. 6, 266–84.

¹²⁴ In *Pol.* 8 Aristotle is conspicuously dependent on the views of certain (philosophical) specialists in music: cf. n. 73 above. This reduces the likelihood that catharsis was an altogether original idea. Bernays (1880: 2) calls the further explanation indispensable; cf. *ibid.* 6 for the claim that Aristotle invented catharsis as a technical concept of aesthetics.

intrusion into, and distortion of, what Aristotle originally wrote. Although a suspicion of this kind had occasionally been aired by earlier scholars, principally by Petruševski (1954),¹²⁵ it had never received much attention in the voluminous literature on catharsis. Scott and Veloso deserve credit for throwing a spotlight onto the hypothesis of interpolation at *Poetics* 6.1449b28. What follows is a brief summary of their chief arguments (leaving aside numerous claims which do not bear directly on the case for interpolation), together with a concise explanation of why I believe their conclusions should be rejected.

Scott (2003) argues that the whole of the last clause in the definition of tragedy, as it stands in manuscript B (δι' ἐλέου καὶ φόβου περαίνουσα τὴν τῶν τοιούτων παθημάτων, 'through pity and fear accomplishing the catharsis of such emotions'),¹²⁶ is a later, non-Aristotelian addition, possibly inserted by someone familiar with an earlier Aristotelian concept of poetic catharsis putatively present in the dialogue *On Poets*.¹²⁷ The main planks of Scott's case are the following.

(S¹) Contrary to the supposed link between the definition and what has preceded (1449b22–4), nothing in *Poetics* 1–5 has anticipated a reference to catharsis, nor to pity and fear: on Aristotelian methodological grounds, therefore, none of these three concepts should appear in the definition.

(S²) The lack of any further explanation of catharsis elsewhere in the treatise also casts grave suspicion on the presence of the term in the definition.

(S³) Repeated references to pity and fear in *Poetics* 9 onwards do not show these emotions to be essential to Aristotle's definition of tragedy, *only* to his prescriptions for the best type of tragic plot.

My response to Scott's case would press the following considerations.

(S¹) Aristotle's statement that the definition of tragedy arises or emerges from what has preceded does not entail that everything in it has been previously mentioned: the idea of 'wholeness' or 'completeness' of action has not been adduced prior to this (Scott wrongly suggests otherwise), nor indeed has the

¹²⁵ Petruševski's own proposed emendation of παθημάτων κάθαρσιν to πραγμάτων σύστασιν, making tragedy 'through pity and fear bring about [or 'to completion'] the structure of such events', has nothing to be said in its favour.

¹²⁶ Scott 2003: 234, Veloso 2007: 268–9, stress that the 'oldest' MS of the *Poetics*, A (10th/11th cent.) has a different reading in the penultimate word of the definition: μαθημάτων κάθαρσιν ('catharsis of such learnings [or studies]'). Neither mentions that the Syriac-Arabic translation tradition of the *Poetics* goes back to a much older Greek MS (probably 6th cent. or earlier) which appears to have read παθημάτων not μαθημάτων: see Edzard and Köhnken 2006: 222–9, for an overview of that tradition, with 231–3 on the definition itself; Centanni (1995) reconstructs the Greek text used by the Syriac translator in a different (and very improbable) form.

¹²⁷ Scott 2003: 254–5, 261–2; for *On Poets*, cf. n. 64 above.

concept of (an) 'action' qua unified structure of events, as opposed to the more general notion of 'people in action' (ch. 2 etc.).

(Sⁱⁱ) The absence of any further explanation of catharsis in the *Poetics* is certainly a prima-facie puzzle, but since *Pol.* 8.7, 1341b39–40 (238 above), suggests that a concept of catharsis does belong somewhere in Aristotle's theory of poetry, we need not resort to the drastic hypothesis of an interpolation to account for this absence. It is more plausible to suppose that the explanation was supplied in *On Poets* and then cited orally in the lectures on which the *Poetics* is based. (Many have supposed, alternatively, that catharsis could have been explained in the lost second book of the *Poetics* itself, in the discussion of comedy. Scott himself, 252–3, is inclined to accept this, though he converts it into the wildly improbable thesis that Aristotle may have believed in comic but *not* tragic catharsis.) Another possibility, assumed by Bernays among others and less extreme than positing an interpolation in the definition, is to suppose that an explanation of catharsis has dropped out of the text somewhere later in chapter 6.

(Sⁱⁱⁱ) Scott fails to deal satisfactorily with passages in the *Poetics* which suggest that pity and fear are essential to tragedy. Two passages in particular deal a fatal blow to his attempt to remove pity and fear (as well as catharsis) from the definition of tragedy. The first is 9.1452a1–3, 'given that [tragic] mimesis is not only of a complete action but also of fearful and pitiable matters', which has all the appearances of a reference back to the definition of the genre. Scott tries to sidestep this inference by claiming (259–60) that Aristotle is here introducing a 'narrower conception' of tragedy than he has so far used, 'since he wishes in this section to examine the best sorts of tragic plot' and it is to the latter alone, Scott maintains, that pity and fear are relevant. But 1452a1–3 is patently making a general (if normative) claim about tragedy, and the transition to explicit discussion of the 'best sorts' of tragedy takes place not in chapter 9 but at the start of chapter 13. It is here that the second passage occurs which undermines Scott's position. When Aristotle says at 13.1452b31–3 that the plot-structure of the finest tragedy 'should be complex not simple, as well as representing fearful and pitiful events (for this is the special property of such mimesis)', Scott's attempt (258) to restrict the parenthesis not to tragedy *per se* but to the finest tragedy is logically flawed: it would make the parenthesis, which purports to give a *reason*, into a mere duplication of the statement it is meant to support. Comparison with 11.1452b1 underlines this point.

(S^{iv}) Aristotle's appeal to 'the stated function of tragedy' (ὁ ἥν τῆς τραγωδίας ἔργον) at *Poet.* 6.1450a30–1 is most readily understood as a reference back to the catharsis clause of the definition. If that clause were deleted, as Scott proposes, the reference back would have to be to plot as the 'end' (τέλος) of tragedy (see Scott 2003: 248, cf. 244; as a *back* reference, it cannot be to the notion of tragic pleasure in chapter 14). But that would render the rest of

Aristotle's sentence at 1450a31–3 vacuous, making it say in effect that a tragedy 'with a plot' (but deficient in character, etc.) will 'much better achieve' a plot.

Velo (2007) believes, like Scott, that the whole of the last clause of the definition of tragedy in *Poetics* 6 is a textual intrusion. He reaches that conclusion via the following claims.

(V¹) In *Politics* 8.5–7, catharsis should be equated with 'rest' (ἀνάπαυσις), 'relaxation' (ἀνεσις), and 'amusement' (παιδιά), which are cited as uses of music at 1339a16–17, b13–14: the triads of musical aims or functions at 1339a16–26, 1339b13–14, and 1341b38–41 should be aligned, though this requires a proposal of textual surgery (Velo 2007: 263–4) to remove the equivalence between relaxation and 'intellectual pursuits' (*diagôgê*) which the text in its current state appears to affirm. This understanding of catharsis as relaxation is irrelevant, Velo points out, to the *Poetics*' conception of tragedy.

(V²) Because catharsis is equated with rest and amusement, no further explanation of it is called for; so the cross-reference at *Pol.* 8.7, 1341b39–40, to further discussion on another occasion, or in another Aristotelian work, is 'supererogatory' (262) and textually suspect.

(V³) '[N]othing in the *Poetics* calls for *katharsis*' (267): the term is not foreshadowed in chapters 1–5 nor required or clarified in any way by the rest of the treatise. But unlike Scott's position (see (S¹) and (S²) above), Velo's case depends on the thesis that 'the arousal of pity and fear' is not in itself, for Aristotle, 'the aim of *any* tragedy', which is rather 'the imitation of a fearful and pitiable action' (279, cf. 275).

(V⁴) The catharsis clause may (280–2) have started as a marginal gloss, δι' ἐλέου καὶ φόβου περαίνουσα τὴν τῶν τοιοῦτων πραγμάτων [or possibly παθημάτων] σύστασιν, (allegedly) meaning 'through pity and fear [i.e. pitiful and fearful actions] accomplishing the arrangement of such events', which was then added to the text, Velo surmises, by interpolator 1 (280, cf. 264). Subsequently, interpolator 2 (who may have been so obtuse as to think that *Politics* 8.7 had some relevance to the *Poetics*, or who might just possibly have had access to a concept of poetic catharsis in Aristotle's *On Poets* (cf. on Scott above) or the second book of the *Poetics*—and who may additionally have been a Neoplatonist, 281), misunderstanding the additional words to refer to 'pity and fear' as emotions, may have changed πραγμάτων [or παθημάτων] σύστασιν, 'arrangement of events', to παθημάτων κάθαρσιν, 'catharsis of emotions'.

My rejection of Velo's case hinges around the following considerations.

(Vⁱ) If in *Pol.* 8.5–7 Aristotle already has three words for the idea of rest, relaxation, and amusement, why would he supplement them with a fourth

word which does not demonstrably have any of those meanings anywhere in classical Greek? Moreover, in its immediate context at 1341a23 the use of the term catharsis is very hard to understand as rest, relaxation, or amusement, since it is linked to the use of the aulos as an ‘intensely emotional’ (*orgiastikon*) instrument. Relatedly, why would Aristotle count as rest or relaxation what is, on Veloso’s own reading of *Pol.* 8.7 (263), a matter of ‘giving free vent’ to one’s natural emotional tendencies? Finally, while the triads of musical functions at 1339a16–26 and 1339b13–14 are the same, 1341b38–41 is more complex (and very possibly corrupt, though Veloso’s textual surgery, particularly in its removal of the cross-reference, is wilfully drastic): catharsis was introduced at 1341a23 without reference to the basic triad, and its presence at 1341b38 appears to be extending the plurality (1341b37) of music’s benefits.¹²⁸

(Vⁱⁱ) Since the terminology of catharsis was *not* standardly used, by Aristotle or anyone else, for rest and relaxation *per se* (cf. the previous paragraph), we should hardly be surprised, on Veloso’s own terms, by the need for further explanation signalled in *Pol.* 8.7. But the multiplicity of psychological nuances to which catharsis terms might lend themselves makes such a need in any case no grounds for suspicion at all.¹²⁹ If *Pol.* 1341b39–40 is an interpolation, the interpolator has to be assumed either to have knowledge of a text of the *Poetics* which is itself corrupt—a doubly demanding hypothesis (see (V^{iv}) below)—or to be acting blindly, which is not a compelling conjecture.

(Vⁱⁱⁱ) Veloso’s attempt to separate the dramatization of fearful and pitiful actions (which he takes to be *intellectually* recognizable, without an emotional reaction, 279) from the arousal of pity and fear in the audiences of tragedy depends on contorted, counterintuitive reasoning. Nothing in the *Poetics* or in Aristotle’s psychology of the emotions gives us reason to depart from the view that the point of depicting pitiful and fearful events in a tragedy is to arouse pity and fear in the audience: *Poet.* 14.1453b3–7 spells out the point unequivocally (Veloso 2007: 277 struggles to marginalize it).¹³⁰ And since it becomes abundantly clear in *Poetics* 9 onwards that Aristotle regards pity and fear as central to the experience of tragedy, there is every reason why reference to them should be found, as it is, in the definition of the genre.

¹²⁸ Cf. Schütrumpf 2005: 649.

¹²⁹ For an overview of the pre-Aristotelian semantics of catharsis, see Halliwell 1998a: 185–90. Cf. Hoessly 2001, Vöhler and Seidensticker 2007, for detailed studies in this area.

¹³⁰ Compare Daniels and Scully (1992), misguidedly attempting on more a priori philosophical grounds to remove ‘real’ audience emotions from Aristotle’s argument; their treatment of *Poet.* 14. 1453b3–7 at 213–14 exposes its own artificiality. Contrast e.g. Segal 1996: esp. 154–7, Lear 1988: 316–17.

(V^{iv}) Veloso's intricate hypothesis of a series of stages by which the catharsis clause might have found its way into the text of the *Poetics* is a tissue of multiple conjectures, peppered with the use of 'perhaps', 'probably', 'might have', and 'may well have' (280–1). *Frustra fit per plura quod potest fieri per pauciora* (William of Ockham): given the available evidence, it is rationally more parsimonious to accept that Aristotle wrote the catharsis clause in *Poetics* 6.

Poetry in the light of Prose: Gorgias, Isocrates, Philodemus

Poetry is not the thing said but a way of saying it.
Can it then be isolated and studied by itself?

(Housman)¹

GORGIAS AND THE SEDUCTIVE POWER OF *LOGOS*

Gorgias' *Encomium of Helen* is a coat of many colours. In part, it is something like a belated defence speech for the most famous of Greek heroines, a 'speech' (though in writing: 21) delivered not in the context of Helen's own (imagined) life but before the court, as it were, of posterity and public opinion.² That notionally central purpose is embroidered, however, with an array of glittering, disorientating elements which turn the work into a strange patchwork of rhetoric, philosophy, and poetry: a showpiece (cf. ἐπιδειξαι, 2) of sophistic inventiveness; an epistemologically teasing riddle of self-reference (an attempt to persuade an audience of the nature of persuasion); a demonstration of how to convert the stuff of Greek myth into material for intellectual analysis; and a sort of résumé, applied to a classic test case, of all the great forces (gods, fortune,

¹ A. E. Housman, 'The Name and Nature of Poetry', Housman 1988: 364. Cf. 304–9 below.

² Cf. Isoc. 10.14–15, with n. 41 below, for (mild) criticism of Gorgias for confusing the modes or genres of encomium and defence.

necessity, force, persuasion, erotic desire) which Greek minds were habituated to see operating on and behind the human scene as a whole.

The *Encomium*, in consequence, defies easy categorization or understanding; it becomes readable (or, in a sense, unreadable) in several ways. But for my purposes what is most remarkable about the work is its three-cornered relationship to poetry. Not only does Gorgias have things to say explicitly about poetry, things sufficiently striking to have made an impression on Plato.³ His speech is also—in its cultivation of an incantatory style, its allusive self-consciousness, and its penchant for indirect connections of thought—a kind of prose-poem in its own right. And more importantly still, Gorgias toys with ideas which seem to intimate the possibility of a poeticization (even ‘aestheticization’) of language and experience in general—the possibility, both enticing and puzzling, that the mind’s activities might all aspire to the condition of poetry. Could such a thought be anything more than a sophistic conceit?

The *Helen* begins by proclaiming, in a magnified equivalent of what one might expect any defence speech to say, that the most beautiful condition (*kosmos*, a state both internally ordered and externally attractive) of discourse, language, or speech (*logos*) consists in nothing but truth.⁴ Later on, however, the work will characterize all *logos*—including poetry, oratory, and philosophy—as having a psychological power both quasi-magical and drug-like in its capacity to ‘shape’ or ‘manipulate’ (πλάττειν) the forms of language and thereby ‘mould’ or ‘imprint’ (τυποῦν) the minds of its hearers.⁵ If language is

³ See in particular Gorg. *Hel.* 9 (= Gorg. B11.9 DK: all further references will be to section numbers alone), the paradox of poetry’s audiences experiencing their own emotions at others’ fortunes (ἐπ’ ἀλλοτρίων τε πραγμάτων καὶ σωμάτων εὐτυχίας καὶ δυσπραγίας) with Pl. *Resp.* 10.606b1 (ἀλλότρια πάθη θεωροῦν); *Hel.* 13 (‘moulding’ or ‘stamping’ the soul with beliefs, τὴν ψυχὴν ἐτυπώσατο ὅπως ἐβούλετο: cf. n. 5 below) with *Resp.* 2.377b (ἐνδύεται τύπος ὃν ἂν τις βούληται). Cf. Ch. 4 n. 99. For other possible echoes of Gorgias in Plato, see Pohlenz 1965: ii. 463 n. 3, Kamtekar 2008: 343–4.

⁴ MacDowell (1982: 33) rightly rejects the tr. ‘adornment’ for *kosmos* here; Worman (2002: 232 n. 32) distorts the force of the sentence and sees a contradiction with *Hel.* 11 where none exists. For various uses of *kosmos* terms in connection with poetry and other forms of discourse, see Ch. 2 nn. 97, 99, plus Index of Greek Terms.

⁵ The word-groups to which the verbs πλάττειν (*Hel.* 11) and τυποῦν (13, 15) belong can be readily combined. πλάττειν means to manipulate or fashion into shape, sometimes by means of a mould or stamp (τύπος can mean either); cf. e.g. Pl. *Resp.* 2.377b (n. 3 above), Arist. *Part. an.* 4.1, 676b9–10. Cf. 278 below.

most authentically itself when it embodies truth, yet also has a seductive, compelling potency which can control its audiences' beliefs and feelings in whatever way its artful exponents choose, then alert (or unseduced) readers cannot help but wonder in what zone of discourse this places Gorgias' own speech. Does it virtuously commit itself to telling the truth while drawing attention to the deceptive allure of others' false persuasiveness, or is it a Siren voice calculated to ensnare us in its own inescapable paradoxes?⁶ And what, given its central concern with the story of Helen, does it imply about the truthfulness or otherwise of poetry?

On a purely abstract level of logic, it appears coherent for Gorgias to stake a claim to the truth of his own speech and at the same time warn his audience/readers of the deceptive falsehoods of others. There is also a sense in which that pair of aims looks initially like a contest between the rational thought processes of prose and the beguiling stories of poetry. The agenda which the work announces for itself involves exculpating Helen (from blame for the Trojan war) by refuting the poets who have done so much to blacken the heroine's reputation; and this refutation will entail 'injecting reasoning/rationality (*logismos*) into my discourse (*logos*)' (*λογισμὸν τινα τῷ λόγῳ δοῦς*, 2), a typically alliterative formula which differently inclined readers may find either pithy or vacuous.⁷ But by the time the work has reached what becomes its central topos, the persuasive power of *logos* (which even displaces Helen herself from the foreground of the picture), we may feel confronted with a speaker who, as it were, protests too much. Gorgias elaborates so fully on the dangerous power of artful language that it is hard to avoid a suspicion that he is throwing a sort of veil of uncertainty over his own persuasive prowess. How, moreover, could any fifth-century Greek audience

⁶ Various treatments of Gorgias' speech, with further bibliography, can be found in Segal 1962, Lanata 1963: 190–204 (extracts only), Buchheim 1989: 159–73 (cf. xxi–xxv), MacDowell 1982, Walsh 1984: 80–106, Porter 1993, Wardy 1996: 25–51, 155–65, Schwinge 1997: 23–32, Schiappa 1999: 114–32, Ford 2002: 172–87, Worman 2002: 156–65, Goldhill 2002: 55–9. The translation by Kennedy (1972: 50–4) should be used with caution; among its errors, 'sailed away, taking Helen as his love' (51) is a serious mistranslation of *ἀπέπλησσε τὸν ἔρωτα τὴν Ἑλένην λαβῶν* (*Hel.* 5), turning an allusion to Menelaus (he 'fulfilled his love by taking Helen [sc. in marriage]') into a seeming reference to Paris. The same error in Dillon and Gergel 2003: 78, Graham 2010: ii. 757.

⁷ Cf. Ch. 3 nn. 47, 54, for a similar phrase used by rationalistic Euripides at *Ar. Frogs* 973.

accept that Gorgias, so long 'after the event', was in possession of the truth about Helen (even supposing they believed there was such a thing as the truth about her in the first place)? Surely, at this late stage of cultural tradition, Gorgias could be doing no more than inventing his own hypothetical reconstruction of Helen's story, employing a mixture of older Greek poetry and sheer imagination to conjure up shades of an inevitably mythologized prehistory?

Two further considerations may increase the impression of Gorgias' creative freedom. One is the fact that a work which starts with a proclamation and promise of truth ends with a notorious, seemingly all-too-sophistic description of itself as a 'game', 'plaything', or *jeu d'esprit* (παίγνιον, 21: the final word of the speech). That in itself does not automatically render null and void everything that has preceded. Gorgias is perhaps hinting that the judgement of Helen as such may not after all be the real significance of the speech, and/or that he has lavished a playful, quasi-poetic creativity on the design and verbal fabric of the work.⁸ But the sign-off is nonetheless unnerving for anyone disposed to extract some stable sense from the speech. The other consideration, already mentioned, is that from whatever angle one approaches the piece, it takes on the air of being itself a sort of prose-poem. This holds both for its self-conscious stylistic artifice (recognized as 'poetic' by Aristotle and no doubt by others before him⁹) and for its explicit assimilation of prose and poetry: 'all poetry I regard and denote as discourse in metrical form' (τὴν ποίησιν ἅπασαν καὶ νομίζω καὶ ὀνομάζω λόγον ἔχοντα μέτρον, 9), as it famously declares. That declaration might be interpreted, prima-facie, as stipulating metre as a necessary condition of poetry, something Aristotle would later deny in the *Poetics*.¹⁰ Even on this interpretation, however, poetry and Gorgianic prose are not pulled wholly apart: Gorgias' own writing pushes its quasi-poetic artifice to the point of manifesting a near-metrical element of rhythmic patterning, so that in that respect too his poeticizing tendencies are visible

⁸ Porter (1993: 274) goes too far in saying that παίγνιον 'empties out the contents of whatever comes before'. Cf. the later use of παίγνιον for poetry, LSJ s.v. iii. 2.

⁹ Arist. *Rh.* 3.1, 1404a25–6, calls Gorgias' style 'poetic'; he implies this was hardly a novel insight. Denniston (1960: 10–12) gives a succinct but barbed account of some defining traits of Gorgianic style; cf. 35, 127, 138. Norden (1898: i 15–79) remains a basic resource.

¹⁰ Arist. *Poet.* 1.1447b9–23, 9.1451a38–1b4.

(or audible).¹¹ But in its context the declaration must in any case be taken to emphasize that poetry is essentially an exhibition of *logos*, the selfsame category of *logos* invoked by the work's opening sentence.¹² On this understanding, whatever can be predicated of poetry, with the single exception of its metrical form, must exemplify properties of all *logos*; equally, though, poetry will be subject to the tension between truth and seduction which Gorgias' argument as a whole exposes. *Helen* creates a deliberate blurring, as further scrutiny will bear out, between its own discourse and the status of poetry. In what it 'does' (its own rewriting, or reinterpretation, of the story) as well as in what it says about poetry, the work is in part an oblique exercise in poetics which reshapes an archaic stock of ideas into a novel if inconclusive standpoint of its own.

Given the task it sets itself, the *Helen* could hardly avoid engaging with the stuff of poetry, since that is the dominant medium in which the reputation of Helen had been formed and perpetuated. Having taken it upon himself to distribute praise and blame correctly by 'refuting those who blame Helen' (*ἐλέγξαι τοὺς μεμφομένους Ἑλένην*, 2), Gorgias immediately marks out the poets as transmitters of the beliefs or convictions which have marred Helen's reputation. It would not be unreasonable, therefore, to expect him—like a litigant who rebuts his opponent's account of events and puts another in its place—to offer an alternative narrative of Helen's life, contradicting the various stories found in poetry. But he does nothing of the kind. In fact, after touching briefly on Helen's genealogy, her divine beauty, the great number and prestige of her suitors, and her marriage to Menelaus, he pulls back, affirming that 'to tell the knowledgeable what they already know may carry conviction but gives no deep pleasure' (*τὸ γὰρ τοῖς εἰδόσιν ἃ ἴσασι λέγειν πίστιν μὲν ἔχει, τέρψιν δὲ οὐ φέρει*, 5) and proceeding to address the possible reasons for Helen's departure to Troy (with Paris).

¹¹ For examples of quasi-metrical phrasing in *Helen*, see Dover 1997: 171, with 169–70 on the metrical resonances of Agathon's Gorgianic speech in *Pl. Symp.* Cf. Schiappa 1999: 110–13.

¹² As MacDowell (1982: 36) points out, the lack of a connective in the sentence in question at *Hel.* 9 shows it to be a proof/example of the preceding claim about the power of *logos* in general. For a construal of Gorgias' position as minimizing the difference between poetry and prose by treating metre as a merely 'external ornament', see Russell (1981: 22–3).

Far from contesting the existing stories of Helen's life, then, Gorgias takes their core narrative for granted—again somewhat like a litigant, but one who disputes not the individual 'facts' but their interpretation and judgement. In other words, he presupposes and in a sense steps inside a given world of poetic myth, at the same time clearing the way for an unimpeded dialogue between the poets' treatment of that world and his own thought processes.¹³ What's more, the reference to 'conviction' and 'deep pleasure' in section 5 is doubly revealing. 'Conviction' (*pistis*) is the same term already used (2) in attacking the damaging influence of the poets (it is the conviction or belief derived from poetic tradition which has tarnished Helen's reputation), while 'deep pleasure' (*terpsis*) is a motif itself strongly associated with the experience of poetry and one which will reappear, with subtle implications, in Gorgias' later remarks on painting.¹⁴ It looks, therefore, as though Gorgias is not simply rejecting poetic tradition but competing with it on its own terms. He may adopt a stance of analytic 'reasoning' (*logismos*), but he nonetheless signals his wish to give his audience a deep pleasure (as well as, not instead of, 'conviction') which can match that to be expected of poetry itself. He also implies that mere repetition of what has been said before by others is not sufficient for his purposes—in itself an apparent compromise on the supreme value of truth proclaimed at the outset.¹⁵

So in a very short space Gorgias has started to complicate his relationship both to truth and to poetry. Despite his gesture towards intellectual 'reasoning', he does not after all present himself as the exponent of a rationalizing repudiation of myth but as its reinterpreter. That position is compatible, as he admits, not only with much of

¹³ There is a general affinity here with the stance of other sophists, most obviously the Protagoras of Plato's dialogue, who (i) constructs a cultural-cum-intellectual ancestry for himself which incorporates the poets (Pl. *Prt.* 316d), (ii) makes interpretation of poetry a prime aspect of his own educational prowess (338e–339a), and (iii) uses mythological narrative as one of his own modes of thought (320c–322d).

¹⁴ On *terpsis* in *Helen*, see 281–4 below. For the emphatic tr. 'deep pleasure', see Ch. 2 n. 13. Cf. Thuc. 1.22.4, where history is called less deeply pleasurable, *ἀτερπέστερον*, than mythologized narratives (but also more 'useful': cf. n. 109 below); similarly, at Thuc. 2.41.4 Pericles contrasts the truth of historical achievement with poetry's intense but temporary pleasure (*τέρπειν*). See Ch. 1, 19–24.

¹⁵ For a possible tension between truth and novelty of discourse, cf. the contrast between Socrates and his sophist interlocutors at Pl. *Grg.* 490e, Xen. *Mem.* 4.4.6, with Dodds 1959: 290.

the content of poetry's narrative traditions but also with poetry's psychological priorities. There is no fundamental split within the realm of *logos*, which should mean, in turn, that poetry itself is perfectly capable of telling 'the truth'. Furthermore, Gorgias' insinuation that the reputation of Helen created by the poets was unanimously negative ('of one voice and one mind', *ὁμόφωνος καὶ ὁμόψυχος*, 2) is disingenuous. His own agenda of exculpatory reasoning is hardly at odds with all of earlier Greek poetry; it can be read on one level as the elaboration of a view of Helen already found in *nuce* in Priam's mouth in the *Iliad*.¹⁶ In this respect too, Gorgias' work qualifies as a kind of prose-poem: not a rationally detached critique of poetry but an extension, in meditatively stylized prose, of its resources of imagination and expression. But two things remain uncertain: one, how the truth announced at the start of the work is to be distinguished from (mere) 'conviction' or belief (*pistis*), for Gorgias has indicated that the latter may itself be either true or false; the other, how truth is to be fused with the (poetic) goal of 'deep pleasure' (*terpsis*) and the psychological absorption it carries with it. However we choose to read Gorgias' competitive dialectic with poetry, these questions are unavoidably prompted, at least in the mind of readers who practise their own critical 'reasoning', by the elusive self-image which his discourse puts on display.

The questions become more pressing, if also more slippery, as the speech works its way through the details of the defence and supposed rehabilitation of Helen. The main thread of argument is obvious and needs no separate discussion here: if Helen was less an independent agent than the victim of some coercive power (whether divinity/fate, sexual violence, irresistible seduction, or erotic compulsion), then she does not deserve to be blamed. What matters for my purposes is how the contours of this argument repeatedly bring us back round, both explicitly and implicitly, to the idea of poetic(ized) *logos* and the enigma of its evaluation. In addition to the emphasis I have already placed on how the work sets itself up in its opening sections as a new kind of prose-poem, overtly competing with poetry (both discursively

¹⁶ *Il.* 3.164–5; cf. Porter 1993: 277–9. On Helen's own, psychologically complex judgements at *Il.* 6.344–58, see Ch. 2, 76, 90. Cf. Blondell (2010*b*) for various reworkings of the Iliadic Helen in archaic poetry, with Gantz (1993: 571–6) for an overview of both literary and visual sources, including the extreme position occupied by Stesichorus' famous recantation (192 *PMG*). Cf. n. 18 below.

and stylistically) while by no means detaching itself from a conception of poetic 'deep pleasure', three other observations are worth making here.

First, the sequence of themes through which Gorgias moves provides a kind of *tour d'horizon* of religious, moral, and psychological preoccupations central to the whole tradition of Greek poetry itself. This means that if there is a general 'truth' to be found in Gorgias' thesis, as the opening of the speech would lead one to anticipate, it must substantially overlap with a truth of the human condition (the subjection of humans to forces larger than, and capable of overpowering, their own agency) which is widely asserted and enacted in poetic myths and narratives.¹⁷ Secondly, when considering the possibility that Helen was victim of an act of abduction and rape by Paris, Gorgias describes her suffering, on this scenario, as a matter of adversity or misfortune (*ἐδυστύχησεν*, 7) and says that she deserves not to be blamed but *pitied* (7, where the verbs *ἐλεεῖν* and *οἰκτίρειν* reinforce one another). In doing so, he is implicitly regarding Helen as a figure worthy of 'tragic' treatment and, accordingly, a tragic response. This is a possibility that may have been generally avoided in Attic tragedy itself (is that actually an ironic subtext of Gorgias' position?) but it nonetheless appeals to an implicitly poetic paradigm of emotionally sympathetic imagination.¹⁸ Thirdly, that last detail becomes subsumed into the next and most famous section of the speech, where Gorgias embarks on his highly wrought characterization of the bewitching influence of *logos* in general. He does this by way of defending Helen as a putative victim of deceptive persuasion, i.e. sexual seduction through words. But this is precisely the juncture at which the work threatens to spiral into a kind of self-destabilization. Gorgias' *logos*, which has proclaimed its own pursuit of truth, now

¹⁷ At Pl. *Resp.* 2.364b (cf. 363e–364a) Adeimantus claims that the common Greek conception of gods inflicting grievous suffering even on the good derives above all from poetry; Socrates develops the point at 379c–380c. In the myth of Er, we find a riposte to such beliefs in the priest's and Socrates' 'anti-tragic' affirmation of the individual soul's responsibility, *Resp.* 10.617d–e, 618b–619a; but cf. Halliwell 2007a: 461–9 for complications in this perspective.

¹⁸ Helen comes close to describing *herself* as a tragic victim ('ruined' by the actions of others) at Eur. *Tro.* 920, 935, but the context of tawdry self-exculpation makes this seem almost parodic. Even so, the play's entire debate between Helen and Hecuba, whether earlier or later than Gorgias' work, shows affinities with the latter in broaching different conceptions of Helen's agency/culpability: cf. Spatharas 2002, Worman 2002: 123–35.

declares that *logos* wields a power which can sweep everything, including truth, out of its way. In a curious respect, the work itself seems to mirror that point by turning *logos* itself, not Helen, into the centrepiece of its discussion in sections 8–14. It is of crucial significance for Gorgias' argument that this passage holds up poetry as a prime model of the mastery of *logos*.

Poetry is adduced as the most immediate illustration of that mastery over the mind. This is on account of its capacity to arouse such emotions such as 'fearful shuddering, tearful pity, and grief-loving longing' (*φρίκη περίφοβος καὶ ἔλεος πολύδακρυς καὶ πόθος φιλοπενθήης*, 9)—the first two manifestly 'tragic', the third reminiscent of a cluster of ideas as old as Homer.¹⁹ Gorgias then adds to poetry the example of religio-medical 'incantations' (*ἐπωδαί*, 10, where the verb *θέλγειν*, 'entrance' or 'bewitch', resonates with a Homeric conception of song); '(false) persuasion' in general (11–12); a cluster of types of *logos* which include celestial speculations, written speeches (like the *Helen* itself), and philosophical disputations (13); and, finally, an analogy with drugs, both harmful and beneficial (14), which brings the depiction of *logos* as a 'mighty ruler' (*δυνάστης μέγας*, 8) to a resounding close.²⁰

Part of the importance of poetry in this chain of reasoning lies in the way in which it deepens and complicates the implications of 'deception' in sections 8–10, where Gorgias posits the third of his four possible causes of Helen's departure to Troy with Paris. He frames this as the hypothesis that 'it was *logos* which persuaded her and deceived her soul/mind' (*εἰ δὲ λόγος ὁ πείσας καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν ἀπατήσας*, 8). Although this clearly corresponds in pragmatic terms to a scenario of sexual seduction, the wording is significantly impersonal: it is the *logos* itself, not Paris as such, which is cast in the role of 'persuader' (cf. 12 for the same point). Furthermore, the logic of what follows tellingly reinforces this. It is not Trojan princes whom Gorgias classes as irresistible (as he ought to, on the hypothesis of 'normal' sexual

¹⁹ 'Pity and fear' were probably an established formula for the emotional territory of at least one paradigm of tragedy; cf. Halliwell 2002a: 213–14, 218, with Ch. 3 n. 60, Ch. 5 n. 122. On 'shuddering', cf. Ch. 5 n. 50. *πόθος*, 'longing', describes Dionysus' experience of (Euripidean) poetry at Ar. *Frogs* 53–67; see Ch. 3, 101–2, cf. 280 below for the same term at Gorg. *Hel.* 18. For connections between 'longing' and experience of song in Homer, see Ch. 2, 46–52 with nn. 16–17.

²⁰ On 'incantations', see Ch. 4, 185–203. On Gorgias' juxtaposition of poetry and 'magic', cf. de Romilly (1973).

seduction) but the mighty power of *logos*. And it is precisely to demonstrate the latter's capacity to achieve 'the most divine effects' (*θειότατα ἔργα*, 8) with its 'lightweight and invisible body' (the sounds of speech) that he turns first to the emotionally intense impact of poetry.²¹

This part of Gorgias' text has become so familiar that one has consciously to pause and step back from it in order to realize afresh the peculiarity of its movement of thought at this point. 'If Helen was seduced by words, no wonder: such is the emotional power of *logos*. Just look at what poetry, to take a prime example, can do to the mind.' What kind of argument, we should ask ourselves, is that? An argument, not least, which turns the idea of deceptive persuasion into something more, and psychologically more obscure, than crude trickery or mendacity. Gorgias' characterization of poetry in section 9 (one of the passages which made an impression on Plato) throws into relief the power of words not (simply) to mislead treacherously but to activate highly charged passions (pity, fear, grief) in response to the play of good and bad fortune, happiness and unhappiness, in the lives of others (*ἐπ' ἄλλοτρίων τε πραγμάτων καὶ σωμάτων*). In Helen's case, then, it is almost as though Gorgias is telling us, paradoxically, that the most famous Greek heroine in poetry succumbed herself to a type of (bad?) poetry in the words of Paris, a notion we might make sense of by thinking of Helen being persuaded to imagine an alluringly different future for herself. But this inevitably attaches ambiguity to the concept of 'deception': what looks malign and doomed to disaster where adulterous Helen and Paris are directly concerned seems to become desirable and valuable, as well as more in keeping with the description of 'the most divine effects' of *logos*, where the emotional psychology of poetry is concerned. What connects the two things is the intensity of the soul-changing experience induced by words. But what remains uncertain is how one can tell in any individual case whether, or in what respect, those words are true or false, good or bad.

Many critics have not unreasonably tried to connect the problem of 'deception' in the *Helen* with the fragment of Gorgias preserved by Plutarch (from an unknown work) in which tragedy is described as a genre which, 'through its stories and sufferings/passions' provides its

²¹ On Gorgias' characterization of speech as a material but 'invisible' substance (*σμικροτάτῳ σώματι καὶ ἀφανεστάτῳ*), see Buchheim 1989: 164, Ford 2002: 176–82.

audiences with ‘a deception in which the one who succeeds in deceiving, rather than the one who fails to deceive, has right on his side, and in which the deceived is wiser than the undeceived’.²² Certainly this fragment helps to make less anomalous the movement in *Helen* from the corrupting deception of sexual seduction, via the idea of *logos*’s ‘divine effects’, to the valuable emotional power of poetry. In both cases I take Gorgias to be emphasizing poetry’s affective impact rather than its ‘objective’ realism or verisimilitude. That is to say, he is positing a certain type of aesthetic attitude or response rather than, as many have suggested, a form of ‘illusionism’ (a concept best understood as a property of an artistic medium itself): the former might be partly induced by, but need not presuppose, the latter, and in the case of tragedy it is a kind of emotional ecstasy in its own right which seems most to the point.²³ By encapsulating its thought in a flourish of paradox, however, Gorgias’ claim about tragedy only heightens the difficulty of seeing what kind of relationship might exist between poetic ‘deception’ and truth, the latter the ‘most beautiful condition’ of all *logos*.

The implications of ‘deception’ for poetry’s status in the *Helen* become more unstable still when we factor in again the double-sided dealings with poetry built into Gorgias’s enterprise. The work itself functions as a critique of and corrective to the misleading

²² Plut. *Mor.* 348c = Gorg. B23 DK: ἡ τραγωδία . . . παρασχούσα τοῖς μύθοις καὶ τοῖς πάθεσιν ἀπάτην . . . ἣν ὁ τε ἀπατήσας δικαιότερος τοῦ μὴ ἀπατήσαντος καὶ ὁ ἀπατηθείς σοφώτερος τοῦ μὴ ἀπατηθέντος. I use ‘succeed’ and ‘fail’ (to deceive) to capture the force of the aorist participle ἀπατήσας. It is preferable (and suits better the ‘affective’ reading in my text) to take τοῖς μύθοις καὶ τοῖς πάθεσιν as an instrumental dative rather than indirect object (Barnes 1982: 463, ‘gave to stories and passions a deception’, which tilts things towards ‘illusionism’, *ibid.* 464). Cf. Halliwell 2002a: 20–1 nn. 48–9 (adding Ephorus *FGrH* 70 F8) for related motifs in Greek aesthetics, varying in emphasis between the ‘realism’ of artworks and the experience of audiences; *Dissoi Logoi* 3.10 (the best tragedian or painter is one who ‘deceives the most by making things that seem like real things’, ὅστις <κα> πλείστα ἐξαπατῇ ὅμοια τοῖς ἀληθινοῖς ποιῶν—cf. Ch. 1, 13–15) is particularly close. See Lanata 1963: 204–7 (with 193–4 on *Hel.* 8), Buchheim 1989: 92–3, 198–9, Willi 2002: 120, for interpretations of Gorg. B23. There is no justification for discerning, with Obbink 2010: 22–3, a move towards ‘allegory’ on Gorgias’ part.

²³ Although Gorgias does not use the vocabulary of ‘ecstasy’ for experience of poetry, he does apply it at 17 to extreme fear mediated by vision (terrible sights make people ‘lose their wits’, φρονήματος ἐξέστησαν): for the parallelism of emotions aroused by language and vision, see 278–81 below. Note the vocabulary of *ekplēxis* in the same context (16), with Ch. 3 n. 60. Gorgianic ‘ecstasy’ is indistinguishable from ‘persuasion’: cf. Ch. 7 n. 21.

influence of (some) poetry about Helen. But in inviting its audience to believe or imagine certain things about Helen, it exercises a rhetorico-poetic persuasiveness of its own, a point underlined by the appearance of pity in Gorgias' treatment of Helen (7) and by the self-referential implications of his compendious statement about the power of *logos* (8). Moreover, when section 14 speaks of *logos* inducing feelings of pain and pleasure, fear and courage, it reminds us both of the 'tragic' emotions of section 9 and also, by its use of the verb *τέρπειν*, of the poeticized pleasure to which section 5 implied that Gorgias' own speech would aspire.²⁴ Gorgianic *logos* embraces more than poetry, but poetry remains not only a primary point of reference but also the one which reflects back most enigmatically on the *Helen's* own discursive goals. That is because poetry has its own *justification* for the use of 'deception' (cf. B23, cited above, 'the one who succeeds in deceiving . . . has right on his side') yet, equally, remains central to the category of *logos* for which Gorgias counts truth and falsehood as the supreme tests of value. If ordinary deception involves, by definition, a contradiction or concealment of truth, poetic 'deception' can carry positive value in virtue of producing fictions which reward the mind in satisfying ways. Even so, we cannot, it seems, simply put poetic deception or fiction in a domain of its own, since the *Helen* professes to judge all discourse by appeal to the standard of truth.²⁵ It is poetry more than anything else, therefore, which leaves the place of truth in Gorgias' argument—both in what it says and in what it purports to achieve—incapable of resolution. For whatever kind of Helen we care to imagine, poetry has the means to make her seem emotionally important to the mind and to elicit feelings of pleasure or pain, pity or loathing, appropriate to the particular version of her story. But how can we possibly know whether poetry (or Gorgias) is giving us the truth about her?

²⁴ *τέρπειν* also occurs in *Hel.* 13, denoting the pleasure of large crowds (*ὄχλος*: cf. n. 57 below, Isoc. 2.49) in rhetorical debates; Thuc. 3.38.3–7 is an inevitable *comparandum*.

²⁵ For deception versus truth, cf. Gorg. B11a.33: Palamedes' defence rests on the truth, not deception (*διδάξαντα τάληθές, οὐκ ἀπατήσαντα*); but that presupposes a forensic model of discourse. Finkelberg (1998: 177) thinks Gorgias legitimizes fiction (which she equates with 'deception') 'as an autonomous sphere which cannot be evaluated by using ordinary standards of "truth" and "falsehood"'. Cf. Grube 1965: 18, '*Logos* . . . is not concerned with truth'. But this does not capture the whole of Gorgias' position in *Helen*. Nor does the vague claim of Porter (1996: 613) that for Gorgias 'poems are not to be evaluated in relation to what they mean'.

As an extension to these issues raised by what one might call the experimental poetics of the *Helen*, some comment is needed on the analogy with painting which Gorgias introduces in the final stage of his argument. Gorgias here completes his thesis by proposing that even if Helen succumbed to her own erotic desire or passion (*erôs*), it was not *her* fault: in this case she was just as much a victim, not an agent, as on the other causal hypotheses he has examined (i.e. those involving the gods/fortune, rape, and persuasive deception). He supports this claim by stressing how 'the soul/mind is moulded, in its very character, through vision' (διὰ δὲ τῆς ὀψεως ἡ ψυχὴ καὶ τοῖς τρόποις τυποῦται, 15). This complements a claim he had previously made about language itself: 'persuasion moulds the soul as it wishes' (ἡ πειθὼ . . . τὴν ψυχὴν ἐτυπώσατο ὅπως ἐβούλετο, 13). Gorgias contends that what is seen in the world can induce emotional reactions which overwhelm the mind even to the point of madness; his prime example is that of terror in battle or in other circumstances of acute danger (16–17). On this account, *erôs* (whether divinely or humanly conceived: Gorgias allows for either) is an affliction of the soul which enters through the eyes. It is just as much a form of 'necessity' or compulsion (ἀνάγκη, 19²⁶) as in the other versions of Helen's misfortune which Gorgias has considered. But why does Gorgias insert into this clear sequence of argument an analogy with painting and sculpture (18), arts which he says have the power to give 'deep pleasure' to the sight (once again the verb *τέρπειν*, as with *logos* in section 5)? One might even think that the analogy *distracts* from Gorgias' point, since it hardly reinforces (as the example of terror on the battlefield certainly does) his contention that visually induced emotions can produce mental disturbance and consternation.²⁷ It is no accident, I believe, that there is a parallelism here of argumentational pattern with the appeal to poetry in section 9. In both cases, a general thesis (about the dangerous powers of deceptive persuasion and the disturbing impact of certain sights, respectively) is illustrated by what look, on the surface, like the special cases of poetry and painting.

²⁶ Cf. the reference to erotic compulsion at Pl. *Resp.* 5.458d, with Halliwell 1993: 158.

²⁷ Nor does figurative art readily fit the larger proposition that things seen 'do not have the nature we merely want them to have, but the nature each thing actually has' (15): see n. 36 below.

The analogy with painting, for which Gorgias gives himself a subtle cue by describing all vision as painted images in the mind,²⁸ fits into place only when we grasp that it is providing something more than a repetition of the immediate topic in the defence of Helen. More precisely, it supplements and modifies the idea of disturbingly charged sights with the thought that painting and sculpture can harness the affective potential of images for *positive* purposes.²⁹ Gorgias draws attention to the shift of emphasis, but also places it in a piquant relationship to the preceding point, by speaking in a characteristic oxymoron of visual artefacts as introducing a 'pleasurable sickness' (νόσον ἡδεῖαν)³⁰ into the eyes (18), in marked contrast to what he had just termed the 'terrible sickness' (δευαῖς νόσοις) of battlefield terror and equivalent experiences (17). In other words, he presents figurative images as having a capacity continuous with, yet significantly distinguishable from, the effects of vision in general. The point is strengthened by the description of painters as 'perfectly producing a single body and form from many colours and bodies' (ἐκ πολλῶν χρωμάτων καὶ σωμάτων ἐν σῶμα καὶ σχῆμα τελείως ἀπεργάσσονται), i.e. creating new, unified visual objects by the specific techniques of their art and thereby arousing pleasure in those who view them. Gorgias does not imply that this pleasure is entirely self-contained; if it were, it is hard to see why he would mention painting at all in this context. Rather, the artistry and pleasure in question are somehow related to the larger emotional effects of vision which are his theme in this section of the speech.

This is put beyond doubt, though also left unanalysed, by an inference which simultaneously completes the analogy with visual art but also allows Gorgias to return to the story of Helen. 'In this way', he says, 'some things naturally cause pain to our vision, while

²⁸ ... εἰκόνας τῶν ὁρωμένων πραγμάτων ἡ ὄψις ἐνέγραψεν ἐν τῷ φρονήματι, 'vision paints images of visible things in the mind', 17 (an influence on Pl. *Phlb.* 39b–40c, where 'paintings in the soul' accompany all perceptions and judgements). Cf. also the earlier trope, 'the eyes of belief', 13, with my text below.

²⁹ The logic of Gorgias' argument requires καὶ μὲν, introducing the analogy, to have the force of 'and yet' (cf. MacDowell 1982: 28, 'but'; Buchheim 1989: 14, 'Indes'), not simply 'moreover' (Kennedy 1972: 18, where 'pictures' should be 'painters').

³⁰ I accept here, with e.g. Lanata (1963), MacDowell (1982), Buchheim (1989), Dobree's emendation of ὄσον to νόσον; cf. the apparatus in DK ii. 294, Buchheim 1989: 14. The phrase may imply not only pleasure taken in something 'unreal', but also (cf. Arist. *Poet.* 4.1448b10–12) that artistic images even of painful things can produce such pleasure; for a different view, see Lanata 1963: 204.

others make it feel longing'.³¹ Vision can elicit feelings of revulsion or attraction, pain or pleasure. But painting and sculpture, Gorgias implies, incorporate emotions, of whatever kinds, into an integrated, pleasurable experience of engrossed contemplation. What's more, the idea of 'longing' or 'desire' (ποθεῖν[?], πόθος—see below) connotes an eroticized response to art, at the same time setting up a paradox in relation to the actual *erôs* of Helen to which Gorgias now returns. Helen's *erôs* was felt, putatively, for the 'body' of Paris, corresponding to the 'single body and form' of the painter's artefact; and her eye may be supposed to have been at least initially 'pleased' (ἡσθέν) by what it saw (19). Yet the consequence, unlike the experience of the viewer of a painting, was a terrible *misfortune* (ἀτύχημα, 19—matching the cognate verb at 15). If, like much else in Gorgias, this sequence of hints has a suggestiveness that it is difficult to reduce to a transparent progression of ideas, it is clear enough that it requires both overlap and difference between 'life' and 'art'. Paintings and statues appear to draw on the inherently affective qualities (as Gorgias supposes) of 'things seen', yet in a way which makes them not only distinctive objects but distinctive 'objects of desire', valued in their own right.³²

Part of the interest of this Gorgianic position, as I have construed it, is that it can support and enhance interpretation of some of the things said earlier in the speech about poetry. Gorgias' argument invites us to recognize a parallelism between the two artforms (a parallelism anticipated by the trope 'the eyes of belief', τοῖς τῆς δόξης ὄμμασιν, at 13), taking poetry to stand in the same relation to *logos* in general as visual art stands to vision in general. The case for inferring such a parallel, which had earlier precedents in Greek culture,³³ is helped by the fact that the vocabulary of 'longing' was present in the characterization of poetry in section 9, where it was already associated with paradox. The 'grief-loving longing' (πόθος φιλοπενθήης) which poetry

³¹ οὕτω τὰ μὲν λυπεῖν, τὰ δὲ ποθεῖν πέφυκε τὴν ὄψιν: I hesitantly retain ποθεῖν here, even though a transitive verb would be expected—hence e.g. MacDowell's *τέρπειν*. Cf. the apparatus in DK ii. 294 for ways of regularizing the text; but Gorgias may be sacrificing strict syntax to aphoristic forcefulness. Even if we emend ποθεῖν, πόθος in the next sentence is sufficient for the train of thought I detect in the passage. Text and translation in Ford 2002: 181 are out of kilter.

³² On the eroticization of poetic experience, cf. n. 65 below, with Ch. 2, 46–7, Ch. 3, 101–3, Ch. 4, 194–9.

³³ Most famously, Simonides' description of painting as 'silent poetry', Plut. *Mor.* 346f, 748a (cf. 17f–18a, 58b) = Simon. test. 47 Campbell (1991). Cf. the coupling of painting and poetry in anon. *Dissoi Logoi* 3.10, cited in n. 22 above.

is there said to be capable of arousing, alongside pity and fear, echoes a famous Homeric motif, the paradoxical 'desire' which is present amidst the sorrows of grief.³⁴ But in section 9 Gorgias is not simply reproducing that motif in its own terms; he is reworking it and adapting its meaning. The explicit attachment of the paradox to poetry, not to one's own life (that passage stresses that in poetry the soul is responding to the fortunes of *others*), means that 'grief-loving longing' is already a second-order phenomenon, a reaction not to experience in general but to the substance of poetically crafted *logos*. And whereas the desire underlying Homeric grief is not a desire for suffering itself, but a need to release and in some way satisfy grief through bodily expression, the emotions felt towards others' lives in poetry are something the mind can actually want to experience again and again.

We can see that the same 'logic' is involved in section 9's reference to poetry as in section 18's reference to painting. In both cases the analogy supplements, as I put it above, the main line of argument. Neither poetry nor painting is said by Gorgias simply to duplicate what happens (hypothetically) with persuasion or vision in a case like Helen's: poetry does not lure anyone into a destructive chain of events, in the way Helen was 'deceived' into catastrophic adultery; and painting and sculpture do not smite their viewers with emotional affliction that robs the mind of all self-possession or rational judgement. Yet Gorgias unmistakably holds up both arts as stimulating intensely heightened psychological states related to the larger forces imagined as impinging on Helen's life-story. The impact of poetry and visual art exemplifies the general, mind-moulding powers of language/vision, but at the same time transforms the results of those powers from potential 'misfortunes' into culturally valuable practices. The thematic foreground of Gorgias' argument—the exculpation of Helen as a victim of irresistible words or sights—does not block out the acknowledgement that persuasive words and alluring images can change lives for the better as well as the worse.

What, then, is the upshot of these thoughts for an implied Gorgianic poetics/aesthetics?³⁵ Gorgias seems to be committed to (or, at any

³⁴ See Ch. 2 n. 18.

³⁵ Barnes (1982: 463–6), though with some convolutions of his own, takes Gorgias to have both a poetics and an aesthetics. Different views of Gorgias' poetics (most of them overinclined to systematize the evidence available to us) are documented in

rate, to entertain) all of the following propositions: that the most beautiful condition or supreme virtue of all *logos*, and therefore (among other things) of poetry, is truth; that 'deep pleasure' (*terpsis*) is also a desirable goal of *logos* and one which is redolent of specifically poetic satisfaction; that existing poetry is sometimes false (e.g. in its depiction of Helen as a wrongdoer) and sometimes true (e.g. in the basic narrative of Helen's life); that all *logos* has a quasi-magical and drug-like capacity to 'mould the soul' and manipulate its beliefs and emotions; that poetry exemplifies the power of *logos* by its heightened capacity for 'deception', but in poetry's case this deception is something valued for its intensity of emotional engagement with the (imagined) 'lives of others'; that vision, like language, is capable of truth ('the things we see do not have the nature we merely want them to have, but the nature each thing actually has'³⁶) but can also, like language, be manipulated to create gratifying, moving figments of consciousness, as in the works of painters; and, finally, that Gorgias' own speech is itself a sort of prose-poem—a rival to, reinterpretation of, and reinvented form of poetry.

Helen does not, I maintain, amount to the exercise in radical relativism it is sometimes claimed to be. It nowhere asserts (self-confoundingly), for instance, that all persuasion involves some form of falsehood; still less does it endorse the outright scepticism of Gorgias' *On Non-Being* (itself a work of unfathomable logical paradoxes) that language can communicate nothing.³⁷ But it does create,

Lanata 1963: 190–2, 193–4, 205–6; her own case for pleasure as the sole Gorgianic criterion of poetic excellence ignores the *Helen's* complaint about the distorting traditions of poetry and plays down the possible implications of B23 DK (see above).

³⁶ ἄ γὰρ ὁρώμεν ἔχει φύσιν οὐχ ἣν ἡμεῖς θέλομεν, ἀλλ' ἣν ἕκαστον ἔτυχε, 15. Redfield (1994: 45–8) ignores this passage, as well as the *Helen's* references to truth, in reaching the unwarranted conclusion that the work reflects the doctrine that there is no way of distinguishing between 'valid' and 'invalid' experience.

³⁷ *Contra* Wardy 1996: 44 ('but if we too *unavoidably* "in persuading, that is forcing, commit injustice" . . .', my emphasis), Gorgias does not make *all* persuasion 'unavoidably' unjust. Wardy's ostensible quotation decontextualizes the final sentence of *Hel.* 12: it refers directly to Paris's unjust use of persuasion; Wardy's analysis (43) is wayward (yielding, among other things, the strange proposition that 'soul' has 'a bad reputation'!). *Hel.* 11 claims that cases of deceptive, malign persuasion *abound*; but the final sentence of 14, 'evil persuasion', actually entails the possibility of 'good persuasion' (which Gorgias' own speech implicitly practises). O'Sullivan (1992: 18) believes that *Helen* (esp. 11) shares with Gorgias' *On Non-Being* (on which cf. e.g. Graham 2010: ii. 782–5) the thesis that 'language could never communicate reality'; similarly Rosenmeyer 1955: 230–3. But *Helen* repeatedly appeals to the notion of

or bring to light, a problem about poetic value which it cannot resolve. The nub of that problem is the twin desirability of truth and 'deception', combined with the seeming impossibility of articulating the relationship between them. Truth is a grasp of how things are, independently of how we would like them to be; it is the equivalent, in all sensory and cognitive modes, of Gorgias' pronouncement on vision ('the things we see do not have the nature we merely want them to have, but the nature each thing actually has', above). Poetic deception, on the other hand, is characterized by its 'thick' texture of imaginative-cum-emotional experience and answers to something other than the purity of truth.

Two further factors add complexity to this combination of values. One is the status of truth as itself a 'beautiful', ordered condition (*kosmos*) of discourse, and therefore a potential feature of the enticements of poetic language.³⁸ The other is the way in which Gorgias associates the power of poetry with a capacity to open the soul of the hearer to strong emotional absorption in the lives of others, and the possibility that such absorption could itself be a channel of emotional truth(fulness). After all, Gorgias' own quasi-poetic undertaking purports to recover the truth about Helen, and at least part of that truth resides in feeling the appropriate emotions for her, including pity (7), as a 'tragic' victim of uncontrollable forces rather than an agent of evil. The truth at issue, that is to say, may be as much evaluative and affective as factual.³⁹ Indeed, the whole 'truth' to which Gorgias' account lays claim is not a matter of basic narrative facts (he takes a core sequence of mythological events for granted) but more like a set of psychological truths applied to Helen's case but ultimately about the entire human condition in its vulnerability to the forces of divinity, chance, violence, seductive persuasion, and the compulsion of erotic desire. Yet that truth seems to coincide with a religious-cum-existential

truth. Porter (1993), at times out-gorgianizing Gorgias, makes a stimulating but overblown attempt to probe *Helen* for a larger conception of language and reality; cf. now Porter 2010: 275–87, 298–307 (which appeared as my own book was going to press).

³⁸ Cf. n. 4 above.

³⁹ The start of the work might be thought to connect truth with evaluative or normative correctness, i.e. praising and blaming the right things, though Gorgias does not formulate the point as an explicit principle.

perspective that is extremely familiar in Greek poetry itself, above all in Homer and tragedy, the genres most obviously evoked by Gorgias' characterization of poetic emotions (fear, pity, 'grief-loving longing') in section 9 and therefore the closest paradigms for part of his own enterprise.

One of several questions left unanswered by Gorgias' speech is how he, or any other practitioner of *logos*, could produce 'deep pleasure' (*terpsis*) from the realization of human weakness and vulnerability. Perhaps the nearest thing to an answer to this question which we can extract from the speech is an intimation that it is only by approaching the condition of poetry at its best—poetry which combines truth and deep pleasure—that any discourse can fully satisfy the mind. If we ask why that should be so, two convergent observations may help to clarify this suggestion. One is that all the other forms of *logos* mentioned by Gorgias (including forms of political, medico-religious, scientific, and philosophical discourse) are capable of disturbing and misleading their audiences' beliefs in ways which interfere with life itself; only poetry, it seems, belongs in a realm of narrative images with a separate life of their own, removed from pragmatic considerations. The other is that if we press the parallelisms between Gorgias' accounts of poetry and figurative art then poetry can assume the status not of a first-order engagement with the world (like the normal functioning of vision) but of a second-order manipulation of thought and feeling to create a seductive replacement for the world (like painting's creation of new, perfect forms for the delight of vision, 18). If painting can redeem even disturbing sights, turning them into a 'pleasurable sickness' for the viewer's eyes, then perhaps poetry can redeem even the tragic extremes of human vulnerability by turning them into free-standing objects of imaginative contemplation. To speculate this far is already to place a burden of theoretical coherence on Gorgias' text which it may not be able to sustain. But it is a reflection of the work's provocative quality as a hybrid, 'playful' prose-poem in its own right that it draws its readers into looking for solutions to the enigmas with which it toys.

ISOCRATES AND THE NARROWED VISION OF A PRAGMATIST

'Well now, discussion of the poets will be left for a later occasion—if old age does not destroy me before then, or if I do not have weightier subjects than that to speak about.'⁴⁰ This less than animated pledge from Isocrates' *Panathenaicus* (written during the period 342–39) is doubly revealing: first, in the mixed message of its halfheartedness; secondly, because it was made just a few years before the author reached the age of 100, rendering his promise of an explicit treatment of poetry somewhat belated, to put it mildly. Despite this impression, however, there are actually quite a few passages in Isocrates' surviving writings, from early to late in his very long career, on the subject of poets and poetry. These passages provide a conspectus of the views of a thinker who occupied a conspicuous position on the intellectual and cultural landscape of fourth-century Athens and Greece, and who had his individual motives, as we shall discover, for regarding poetry as a sort of benchmark by which to test his own ideals of writing. Since, moreover, Isocrates had probably received some training from Gorgias, the examination of his case also gives us an opportunity to see how one of Gorgias' students reacted to his mentor's elusive conception of poetic value.⁴¹

The sentence from *Panathenaicus* quoted above belongs to an exercise in Isocratean self-justification (something he resorted to, with a degree of obsessiveness, on numerous occasions in his work) in the face of accusations that his own system of philosophical education (*paideia*) was narrow and impoverished. Among other things, some of Isocrates' rivals and opponents alleged that this system neglected the importance of poetry, the traditional backbone

⁴⁰ Isoc. 12.34: *περὶ μὲν οὖν τῶν ποιητῶν αὐθις ἐροῦμεν, ἢν μὴ με προανέλῃ τὸ γῆρας, ἢ περὶ σπουδαιοτέρων πραγμάτων ἔχω τι λέγειν ἢ τούτων.*

⁴¹ The tradition that Isocrates studied with Gorgias was not uncontested but appears to have been endorsed by Arist. fr. 137 Gigon = 139 Rose; cf. Norden 1898: i. 116. Certainly Isocrates did not revere Gorgias in all respects: see the unflattering references to *On Non-Being* at 10.3, 15.268, and the less than wholly favourable mention of his career at 15.155–6. But 10.14–15 has praise for the *Helen*, despite criticism of its generic confusion.

of Greek education.⁴² Isocrates denies the allegation, which he attributes, clearly stung by it, to those who themselves ‘talk drivell’ about the poets.⁴³ But the fact that it was made at all is nonetheless significant, for reasons which this section will attempt to probe. Isocrates always prided himself on the pragmatic, useful character of his educational methods; he scorned those of many other teachers as speculative and pointlessly esoteric. Although he was in large measure concerned with preparing his students for the civic world of public speaking, he did not believe in cultivating rhetorical ability as a facility for its own sake, divorced from the aim of affecting the most urgent political issues of the day. Nor did he believe that oratory could be turned into a scientifically precise body of principles: it requires both natural flair and practice, is irreducible to purely technical codification, and is in part a ‘creative’ or ‘inventive’ (ποιητικόν, in other contexts ‘poetic’) enterprise that can fulfil its full potential only in action.⁴⁴ Both truth and value reside, for Isocrates, in pursuing practical wisdom, *phronêsis*, through the distinctively human medium of language and thought (both encompassed by his compendious conception of *logos*: ‘speech’, ‘rationality’, ‘discourse’), and in the application of such wisdom to the building of shared, panhellenically defined structures of civilization.⁴⁵

⁴² Isocrates’ opponents presumably subscribed to the view enunciated by Protagoras at Pl. *Prt.* 338e–339a, that it is ‘the greatest component of a man’s cultural education (*paideia*) to be adept in discussing poetry’.

⁴³ The charge of neglecting poetry is reported at 12.19. It comes from those Isocrates describes as ‘reciting like rhapsodes the works of the poets [including Homer and Hesiod] in the Lyceum and talking drivell about them’ (τοὺς ἐν τῷ Λυκείῳ ῥαψωδοῦντας τὰ κείνων καὶ ληροῦντας περὶ αὐτῶν), 12.33; compare 12.18–19, including the gibe that these intellectuals lack ideas of their own about poetry but ‘produce from memory the most appealing things said by others before them’ (τῶν πρότερον ἄλλοις τισὶν εἰρημένων τὰ χαριέστατα μνημονεύοντες). We cannot confidently identify who is meant; cf. Wilcox 1943: 130–1, Merlan 1954: 69 n. 2 (‘a pro-Aristotle faction within the Academy’), Roth 2003: 85–6. Alcidas may possibly have been one of them, as conjectured by e.g. O’Sullivan 1992: 72 n. 60; cf. Ch. 4 n. 52. Antisthenes was surely dead by the date of the *Panathenaicus*: see Giannantoni, SSR iv. 200; Perlman 1964: 160 n. 33 misunderstands the views of Blass.

⁴⁴ See esp. Isoc. 13.12 (*Against the Sophists*: c.390, an early, programmatic work) for his critique of those who mistake the ‘creative/inventive business’ (ποιητικὸν πρᾶγμα) of ‘philosophy’ and public discourse for a ‘codified art’ (τεταγμένη τέχνη).

⁴⁵ For basic overviews of Isocrates’ career, see Ostwald and Lynch 1994: 595–602, Usher 1999: 296–323; cf. Rutherford 1995: 63–6. I have explained my own scepticism about Isocratean ‘philosophy’ in Halliwell (1997a); cf. the trenchant thoughts of Murray (1999). Other accounts in e.g. Mikkola 1954: 193–212, Wardy 1996: 92–6, Nightingale 1995: 26–41, Schiappa 1999: 162–84. A range of (overoptimistic?)

In addition to their broader importance for the history of Greek rhetoric, and for Isocrates' immense influence on later canons of 'liberal education' and 'civic humanism', the ideas just sketched lend a special edge to the allegation of having neglected the poets which some of his contemporaries brought against Isocrates—an allegation whose force he inadvertently seems to admit in the very act of rebutting it ('if I do not have weightier subjects to discuss'). The two-sided question I want to pose here is: was there something about poetry which reduced its significance for a self-proclaimed pragmatist like Isocrates? Or was there something about Isocrates' perspective on education that made him fail to appreciate, as some of his enemies suggested, the full cultural worth of poetry? While we cannot get to the bottom of everything at stake between Isocrates and his rivals, the fact that poetry became an issue of contention between them gives us a glimpse of some of the ways in which disputes about poetic value could become caught up in larger ideological clashes—just as they did, though with a rather different configuration of factors, in the case of Plato.⁴⁶

If we piece together the most striking remarks about poetry which Isocrates makes in scattered passages of his surviving works, answers of a sort to these questions start to emerge. Isocrates is prepared on occasion to subscribe to a traditional conception of poets as purveyors of wisdom for life. Drawing to the attention of Nicocles, king of Cyprus, the various sources from which wise and sage advice might be derived for his enlightened rule of his kingdom, Isocrates tells him that 'some of the poets who lived in the past have left injunctions for how to live' (*ὑποθήκας ὡς χρὴ ζῆν*), injunctions which, like the guidance available from the laws and wise friends, are capable of improving people, making them 'better' (*βελτίους*).⁴⁷ The idea of

appraisals of Isocrates' continuing importance for ideas of civic education can be found in Poulakos and Depew (2004); cf. Halliwell (2006c). Finley 1975: 193–214 is a provocative but flawed critique of the Isocratean 'heritage' in modern liberal arts education; ironically, Finley himself displays an intellectual utilitarianism not unlike Isocrates' bent of mind. The exposé of Isocrates' political thought in Baynes 1955: 144–67 remains, to my mind, devastating.

⁴⁶ For Platonic nervousness about accusations of devaluing poetry, see Ch. 4, 187, 190–1.

⁴⁷ Isoc. 2.3 (*To Nicocles*). Compare Socrates' *denial* that the creators/performers of music and poetry have any concern to make people 'better' at Pl. *Grg.* 501e; cf. 502e, *Resp.* 10.599d, n. 110 below.

improving people was one of the general aims of poetry on which Aeschylus and Euripides agreed in Aristophanes' *Frogs* (1009). It is a very general formula, but it attests to a tenacious Greek tradition of thought (anchored in didactic and gnomic verse: see below) which looks to poetry for an edifying impact on the mind that can make a lasting difference to its audiences' values and attitudes. Further on in *To Nicocles* Isocrates couples 'those poets who have the finest reputations' (τῶν ποιητῶν τῶν εὐδοκιμούντων), probably by implication the best poets of the *past* again, with intellectuals or 'sages' (σοφισταί, sometimes 'sophists'), i.e. people by implication like himself: 'be a listener (ἀκροατής) to the one group and a pupil (μαθητής) of the others', he urges the king.⁴⁸ Since Isocrates' whole conception of *philosophia* is a sort of conglomerate of inherited wisdom constantly tested and refreshed by practical engagement with the major issues of the day, it is easy to see why he might bracket (some) poets in this way with intellectuals like himself. On this level, poetry and prose are a continuum, with a common capacity to embody ethical truths. But could similar considerations induce Isocrates to think of his own system of philosophical education as a new synthesis of wisdom which makes the poets no longer as indispensable as they may once have been?

Before pondering that point further, it is necessary to see that Isocrates certainly does not see the nature of poetry as exhaustively characterized by its 'advice for life'. In *Busiris*, for instance, which contains a critique of Polycrates' own work of the same name, he complains that in depicting the (for us, mythical) Egyptian king Busiris as a killer of foreigners Polycrates had shown a total disregard for truth and followed the poets' impious 'slanders' (βλασφημίας) against the gods and their offspring.⁴⁹ Insisting that the poets have told such stories or made such statements (*logoi*) about the gods as no one would dare to say about their *enemies*, Isocrates proceeds as follows: 'not only have they ascribed to them such shameful deeds

⁴⁸ Isoc. 2.13. At 1.51 (*To Demonicus*, considered spurious by some), 'the best' of what the poets offer should be learnt and used as a repository of ethical paradigms alongside any 'useful' (χρήσιμον) advice from 'other sages (σοφισταί)': i.e. poets are here a subclass of 'intellectuals', whereas at 2.13 (cf. 4.82) they are a parallel group to them; differently Sandys 1868: 40–1. Cf. 298–9 below. For general juxtapositions of poetry and prose, see e.g. 2.7, 12.35.

⁴⁹ Isoc. 11.38–40. The verb βλασφημεῖν is used at 10.64 of Stesichorus' original (pre-recantation) denigration of Helen.

as theft, adultery and working as hired hands to humans, they have told stories (ἐλογοποίησαν) about them eating their own children, castrating their fathers, tying up their mothers, and many other lawless acts' (11.38). This passage patently echoes Xenophanes' critique of poetic myths of divine immorality; by the same token, it is parallel (though we cannot be sure of its chronological relationship) to Socrates' critique of such myths in *Republic* 2.⁵⁰ Isocrates leaves the impression that in much of their work the poets have committed offences against (religious) truth. He even claims that they were punished for these offences (sc. by the gods), citing supposed cases of poets living as beggars (an allusion to one biographical belief about Homer), being blinded (Stesichorus and again Homer are intended here), spending a lifetime in political exile (Alcaeus?), and being torn to pieces like Orpheus.⁵¹ If the passages cited earlier treat poets as sages who can supply wise guidance on how to live, it seems that in the pernicious falsity of some of their myths their role can become the very reverse of that. Where they go so badly wrong, we can learn from them only as anti-models: to believe such stories—which Isocrates implies that some do—is as impious as to recount them in the first place.⁵²

What we have so far seen, then, involves a distinction, and a possible tension, between two modes of poetic influence on the workings of a culture: one, the provision of explicit instruction or guidance for life; the other, communication through the religious and ethical schemata of mythological narrative, a form of meaning whose dissemination of false beliefs, as criticized in *Busiris*, is presumably counterbalanced by a corresponding capacity for truth-telling. We should note at once that both these modes are found in Isocrates' own writings, making his conceptions of poetry and of his own *philosophia* to some degree interconnected and/or in competition (a point to

⁵⁰ Cf. Xenophanes B10–11 DK, with Livingstone 2001: 170–6, Eucken 1983: 196–8. See Livingstone 2001: 40–7, Eucken 1983: 173–83 on possible datings of *Busiris* to the 380s or 370s; the lower date would make it easier to ascribe knowledge of Plato's *Republic* (arguably alluded to at 11.17) to Isocrates (cf. Livingstone 2001: 48–56), though the circulation of earlier versions of Plato's dialogue complicates the question. Parallelism with Plato is made more striking in the statement at 11.41 that gods have no part in evil (cf. esp. Pl. *Resp.* 2.381b). Contrast Aristotle's rebuttal of Xenophanes' critique at *Poet.* 25.1460b35–1461a1, with Ch. 5, 220–1.

⁵¹ Cf. Livingstone 2001: 176–8. For accounts of Homer's life as one of poverty and beggary, see Graziosi 2002: 125–63; she does not cite Isoc. 11.39.

⁵² 11.40: see 292–4 below on the problem of 'myth' and 'belief' in Isocrates.

which I shall return). But a further complication can now be added to the picture of Isocrates' views on poetry if we revisit *To Nicocles*. In a later section of the work than the two passages on poetic 'injunctions' and advice already cited, we find Isocrates lamenting that people often pay mere lip service to the ethical utility of poets like Hesiod, Theognis, and Phocylides, preferring in reality much lower kinds of satisfaction from poetry. In one sense, this passage complements the earlier ones, since it states that 'everyone thinks' (or 'conventionally accepts') that 'the most useful poems and prose works' (notice, once more, the continuum of poetry and prose) are those which 'give (ethical) advice'.⁵³ The reference to Hesiod, Theognis, and Phocylides shows that it is didactic and gnostic forms of poetry which provide (through their explicit *gnômai* or aphoristic 'maxims', 2.44) the most obvious instances of the model of ethical instructiveness on which Isocrates relies. But while people are prepared to *call* such figures 'the best counsellors for human life' (συμβούλους τῷ βίῳ τῷ τῶν ἀνθρώπων), in practice they avoid their advice, just as they might avoid that of their wisest friends. Instead, they prefer the pleasure of 'the crudest kind of comedy' to the 'finely crafted' sentiments of didactic or elegy.⁵⁴

Isocrates stresses in this same context that the general mass of people lead an existence of unreflective dissoluteness. In doing so, they 'flee from the truths of the real world', a telling formulation which chimes with other evidence to show that 'truth', for Isocrates, is both pragmatic (determined by applicability to shifting circumstances) and normative (a matter of good judgement).⁵⁵ By implication, therefore, the same holds for the truth which should be sought in poetry: it needs to satisfy the test of being able to shape and inform well-ordered, purposeful lives. Isocrates' sneer at the popularity of

⁵³ τὰ συμβουλευόντα καὶ τῶν ποιημάτων καὶ τῶν συγγραμμάτων χρησιμώτατα μὲν ἅπαντες νομίζουσιν . . . , 2.42. At 2.46 Isocrates equates, or at any rate closely associates, 'giving advice', 'teaching', and 'saying what is useful' (ἡ παραινῶν ἢ διδάσκων ἢ χρήσιμόν τι λέγων).

⁵⁴ ἡδίων γὰρ ἂν κωμωδίας τῆς φανλοτάτης ἢ τῶν οὕτω τεχνικῶς πεποιημένων ἀκούσειαν, 2.43–4. With the phrase 'counsellors for human life', cf. the kind of view questioned by Socrates at *Pl. Resp.* 10.606e. For the notion of learning *gnômai* from poetry, cf. Aeschin. 3.135 (Hesiod).

⁵⁵ τὰς ἀληθείας τῶν πραγμάτων φεύγουσιν, 2.46; similar phrases at 5.4, 9.39, in both cases involving what Isocrates represents as correct political-cum-moral appraisal of a situation. For Isocrates as a pragmatist but *not* a relativist about truth, see Halliwell 1997a: 120–1.

comedy suggests that he regards this genre as tending to pander to base appetites (for vulgar action and language), as well as lacking any kind of poetic artistry.⁵⁶ A contrast between edifying 'gnomic' poetry and the crude pleasures of comic vulgarity looks like a straightforward, if puritanically rigid, statement of values. But Isocrates expands this perspective in a manner which is far more surprising and prompts some awkward questions. The passage is worth quoting extensively:

It is evident, anyway, that those who wish to compose, whether in poetry or prose, something that will gratify the majority should seek out not the most beneficial kinds of discourse but those which have been most elaborately mythologized. For people take pleasure both in listening to such things and in watching them performed as contests and competitions. That is why it is right to admire Homer's poetry, as well as those who first invented tragedy: recognizing human nature, they exploited both these forms of experience for their poetry. Homer made his myths out of the contests and wars of demigods, while the tragedians turned the myths into enacted contests, so that we may not just hear them told but actually watch them. The existence of such models has shown those who desire to transport the souls of their audiences that they should abstain from giving moral instruction and advice, and should instead say the sorts of things in which they can see that the masses take most pleasure.⁵⁷

This passage is preceded, as we saw, by Isocrates' self-alignment with those poets who do offer serious ethical guidance (2.40–2). It is

⁵⁶ Isocrates' only other reference to comedy is 8.14: he brackets comic poets with reckless politicians as the only groups who can afford to exercise *parrhêsia*, free or frank speech; this must allude to comedy's use of crude, abusive language. Though some twenty years apart, both 2.44 and 8.14 presumably apply to varieties of 'Middle' comedy.

⁵⁷ 2.48–9: ἐκείνο δ' οὖν φανερόν, ὅτι δεῖ τοὺς βουλομένους ἢ ποιεῖν ἢ γράφειν τι κεχαρισμένον τοῖς πολλοῖς μὴ τοὺς ὠφελιμωτάτους τῶν λόγων ζητεῖν ἀλλὰ τοὺς μυθωδεστάτους· ἀκούοντες μὲν γὰρ τῶν τοιούτων χαίρουσι, θεωροῦντες δὲ τοὺς ἀγῶνας καὶ τὰς ἀμίλλας. διὸ καὶ τὴν Ὀμήρου ποίησιν καὶ τοὺς πρῶτους εὐρόντας τραγωδίαν ἄξιον θανμάζειν, ὅτι κατιδόντες τὴν φύσιν τὴν τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἀμφοτέραις ταῖς ἰδέαις ταύταις κατεχρήσαντο πρὸς τὴν ποίησιν. ὁ μὲν γὰρ τοὺς ἀγῶνας καὶ τοὺς πολέμους τοὺς τῶν ἡμῶν ἐμυθολόγησεν, οἱ δὲ τοὺς μύθους εἰς ἀγῶνας καὶ πράξεις κατέστησαν, ὥστε μὴ μόνον ἀκουστούς ἡμῖν ἀλλὰ καὶ θεατοὺς γενέσθαι. τοιούτων οὖν παραδειγμάτων ὑπαρχόντων δέδεικται τοῖς ἐπιθυμοῦσι τοὺς ἀκρωμένους ψυχαγωγεῖν, ὅτι τοῦ μὲν νουθετεῖν καὶ συμβουλευεῖν ἀφεκτέον, τὰ δὲ τοιαῦτα λεκτέον, οἷς ὁρῶσι τοὺς ὄχλους μάλιστα χαίροντας. For other contrasts between 'beneficial' and pleasure-giving discourses, see 8.39, 12.1.

followed by his suggestion to Nicocles not to judge serious matters by pleasure, as others do, but to heed those counsellors (like Isocrates himself) who can vouchsafe philosophical sagacity and political advice (2.50–4). Framed in that way, it seems hard to avoid the inference that both Homeric epic and tragedy are being demoted to the rank of gratification for ‘the masses’ (*ὄχλους*, hardly a flattering term). Given the logic, indeed, of the whole stretch of the work from section 42 to 49, it is not instantly obvious why Homer and tragedy should count as superior to ‘the crudest kind of comedy’. Yet Isocrates brings himself to speak of ‘admiring’ Homer and the tragedians. Why should this be?⁵⁸

The more one dwells on the passage in its context, the more ambivalent it starts to look. This ambivalence, symptomatic of a wider instability in Isocrates’ relationship to the status of myth, stems from the contrast between the ‘most beneficial’ kinds of discourse and those that are (literally) ‘most elaborately mythologized’ (*μυθωδεστάτους*). For the most part Isocrates appears to accept the general veracity of traditional myths, or at any rate their validity as repositories of important paradigms of both human and divine affairs; this is the case not least for those involving, as in the present passage, the ‘demigods’ of heroic myth in the generation of the Trojan war and the era preceding it.⁵⁹ He can even go out of his way to defend against others’ doubts the truth of an individual myth such as the story of Demeter’s visit to Attica during her search for Persephone.⁶⁰ At the same time, we have already seen from his diatribe in *Busiris* on poets’ ‘slanders’ about the gods and their offspring that

⁵⁸ Grube (1965: 43 n. 2) thinks that Isocrates here ‘ironically’ commends Homer and the tragedians—an understandable interpretation but not, I think, right. Cf. Eucken 1983: 246–7.

⁵⁹ ‘Demigods’ (*ἡμίθεοι*: on earlier usage see West 1978: 191), i.e. those of half-divine parentage, is a common term in Isocrates for such heroes: see e.g. 3.42, 5.137, 143, 9.13, 39, 70 (n. 66 below), for cases which leave no doubt that he treats such figures in principle as ‘historical’. Examples of particular myths recounted as though belonging to history include 4.54–7, 12.168–74 (the Seven against Thebes and the Athenian aftermath; but cf. n. 61 below), 4.54–7 (the refuge of the Heracleidae at Athens).

⁶⁰ Isoc. 4.30–3 defends the myth against objections that it is merely an old story. 1.50 states that ‘everyone’ believes certain myths (Zeus’ paternity of Heracles and Tantalus), implying that this is not so with *all* myths: Veyne 1988: 51 (cf. 82, 92) finds here a ‘bad conscience’ about the truth of myth; but see n. 63 below. The common claim that Isocrates makes no distinction between myth and history, e.g. Usher 1990: 156, is a simplification; contrast Sandys 1868: 58.

Isocrates is by no means committed to wholesale belief in the entire mythic corpus. Several passages show that he regards the aggregate of inherited myths as a mixture of truth and invention. The kind of uncertainty to which this leads can be nicely captured by juxtaposing two passages on the Trojan war. In one, from *Evagoras*, he feels able to contrast the war's 'myths' with its 'truth(s)' (without, of course, telling us how he knows the difference), thereby accepting its core historicity while leaving room to treat specific elements of the tradition as fabricated.⁶¹ In the other, from the *Panegyricus*, he makes the category of *muthoi*—those stories sufficiently important to form an archive of Greek cultural self-definition—embrace equally, and without any visible distinction, the Trojan and the Persian wars.⁶² Whatever this says about Isocrates' conception of history (perhaps that the more significant an event of history, the more it will lend itself to a condition of retelling that acquires the status of 'myth?'), it confirms that his conception of *muthos* has built into it, without being reducible to, a potential for fictionalizing enhancement.

It is directly relevant to this point in general and to *To Nicocles* 48–9 in particular that the adjective *muthôdês*, rendered by 'most elaborately mythologized' in the earlier extract, is not a neutral term for Isocrates (any more than it had been for Thucydides). All four occurrences of the word in his work pick out a fictionalizing factor or tendency within the body of 'myth(s)'. The story of Demeter, for example, whose essential veracity he affirms at 4.28–33, is nonetheless conceded to have 'become mythologized' in this way (*μυθώδης ὁ λόγος γέγονεν*, 4.28)—exposed, we might say (and not inappropriately, given the element of dramatic (re)enactment involved in Eleusinian ritual), to

⁶¹ 9.66, *μῦθοι* ctr. *ἀλήθεια* in regard to the Trojan war. See 9.6 for a movement of thought from 'those who existed' (*γενομένων*) in the Trojan war era (and earlier) to generalized uncertainty over whether certain figures in such stories actually existed (*οὓς οὐκ ᾔσασιν εἰ γέγονασιν*). Cf. 9.36 for the idea that poets in general mix historical events with inventions of their own. Note Isocrates' own admission at 12.172 of deliberately varying the details of a myth (the Seven against Thebes) for the needs of particular contexts.

⁶² 4.158: Blass, see Benseler and Blass 1907: pp. xxiii, 79, bracketed the words *καὶ Περσικοῖς*, but Mathieu and Brémond (1938), Mandilaras (2003) retain the words. Even if we adopt the emendation, the passage still treats the two wars as directly comparable; cf. 4.83, with n. 59 above for the basic historicity of the Trojan war. There was at least one poetic precedent for this comparison of the two wars: Simon. 11 *IEG* (Plataea elegy) shows the juxtaposition.

special forms of narrative amplification and exaggeration.⁶³ This is crucial to the interpretation of what Isocrates says about Homer and the tragedians too. In their case he does not commit himself to an explicit judgement on the truth or falsity of the mythic material *per se*, though the ‘demigods’ or heroes of such myth are at root, as indicated above, figures of a past that in his eyes counts as real. But for both these genres Isocrates foregrounds a manner of telling or dramatizing the myths which brings with it effects of special poetic enhancement. His emphasis, as the passage as a whole confirms, implicitly falls on an interrelated pair of qualities: first, strong narrative-cum-imaginative concentration and drive, a feature far removed from the abstract, codified *gnômai* which Isocrates locates at the heart of ethically instructive poetry, and one which gives rise, with tragedy, to enactive, staged presentation for the eyes as well as the ears;⁶⁴ secondly, but relatedly, a power to grip and engross the minds of mass audiences, to ‘transport their souls’ (*ψυχαγωγεῖν*) into an altered state of consciousness.⁶⁵

Isocrates seems to feel compelled, then, to acknowledge the absorbingly vivid appeal of both the narrative substance (the ‘contests and wars’, to which we can add terrible sufferings⁶⁶) and the expressive

⁶³ Note the clear reference to Eleusinian ritual at 28–9: Parker (2005: 355) takes the passage to allude to a form of sacred/mystic ‘drama’ within the Mysteries; Veyne (1988: 82) misses the nuance of the tense *γέγονεν* at 4.28. It is hard not to sense here the influence of the idea of *τὸ μυθώδες* at Thuc. 1.21.1, 22.4; cf. Flory 1990: 194 and see Ch. 1, 19–24. Other Isocratean uses of *μυθώδης* all imply exaggeration if not falsity: see 2.48 (291 above), 12.1 (298 below), 237 (note the contrast at 238). Cf. the opposition of *μυθώδης* and *ἀληθινός* at Pl. *Resp.* 7.522a, and of *μυθώδης* and (by implication) ‘true’ at Phld. *Poem.* 5.7.9–11 (with n. 148 below).

⁶⁴ Isocrates clearly recognizes a technical distinction, akin to those drawn in Pl. *Resp.* 3 and Arist. *Poet.* ch. 3, between narrative and dramatic modes (which he calls ‘forms’, *ιδέαι*, 2.48) of depiction/performance. He might also arguably be hinting at a point akin to Aristotle’s at *Poet.* 4.1448b36–9, namely that tragic drama was an *extension* of a ‘dramatizing’ impulse in Homeric epic itself.

⁶⁵ At 10.65, Isocrates goes so far as to frame Homer’s appeal as quasi-erotic, relating the claim that a dream of Helen inspired the poet to make the *Iliad* so ‘seductively attractive’ (*ἐπαφρόδιτος*), i.e. a poetic equivalent to Helen’s own beauty. Cf. n. 32 above.

⁶⁶ See Isoc. 9.70 (‘of the demigods, we shall find that most—and the most famous—were afflicted by the greatest disasters’, *ταῖς μεγίσταις συμφοραῖς περιπεσόντας*; for the sentiment, including reference to ‘demigods’, cf. Simon. 523 PMG), 12.168 (the disasters of Adrastus with the Seven against Thebes), and 4.158 (standardly taken as an echo of Gorg. B5b DK) on the dirges (*θρήνοι*) sung for those (heroes) who suffered disasters in wars between Greeks. See my text, below, for Isocrates’ perspective on tragic pity. For *συμφορά*, ‘disaster’, characterizing the core of heroic myth, see Gorg.

resources of epic and tragic poetry, even in the same breath as he sets them against the educational and philosophical functions of more austere poets like Hesiod, Theognis, and Phocylides, or, indeed, of writings like his own. This helps, moreover, to clarify the difference he perceives between Homer and the tragedians, on the one hand, and 'the crudest kind of comedy', on the other: while the latter is the poetic equivalent of a mere debasement of human nature, the former, though not entirely above suspicion (given their supposedly calculated appeal to 'the masses'), constitute a culturally sophisticated exploitation of the emotional and imaginative power of words, something that necessarily merits a certain amount of respect within an Isocratean scheme of values.⁶⁷

Where, though, does this leave the larger picture of Isocrates' poetics, the poetics he might have worked out if he had ever kept that reluctant promise in the *Panathenaicus*? One mistake would be to infer from *To Nicocles* 42–9 that Isocrates operates with a sheer dichotomy, an unbridgeable gap, between gnomically instructive or beneficial works and those which depend on narrative excitement. The kind of mistake this would involve can be brought out by registering that *To Nicocles* 48–9 certainly does not tell the whole story of Isocrates' view of Homer. Elsewhere, for instance, he endorses Homer's great reputation for wisdom (*sophia*) by explaining how the poet conveys a message about the human condition: Homeric images which show even the gods as sometimes deliberating about the future serve to underline the fact that knowledge of the future is impossible for *us* and that it is therefore futile to lay claim to it, as some of Isocrates' intellectual rivals allegedly do.⁶⁸ But not only does this example depend on an interpretative inference from scenes of narrative, rather than the presence of anything like explicitly gnomic wisdom in the voice of the poet. It also incorporates recognition of Homer's use of a certain type of fictional imagination: Isocrates states that the poet constructed such scenes 'not from knowledge of the

Hel. 2 (the Trojan war) and cf. n. 78 below. Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1.9, 1100a6–9, turns to a mythical figure, Priam, to illustrate the 'great disasters' (μεγάλαις συμφοραῖς) which can destroy happiness even at the end of a long life.

⁶⁷ 2.48 suggests that Homer and the tragedians had active insight (κατιδόντες κτλ.) into human nature and 'applied' this (καταχράσμαι) to produce works that could actively grip the minds of large audiences.

⁶⁸ Isoc. 13.2.

mind of the gods' (οὐ τὴν ἐκείνων γνώμην εἰδώς).⁶⁹ In other words, Homeric passages of this kind should not be understood as laying claim to a strictly 'theological' truth. Rather, Homer wanted to 'demonstrate' (ἐνδείξασθαι) to his audience certain truths about the human world by means of narrative-cum-dramatic projection onto the divine world. This is an (oblique) form of showing, not telling. It seems that, for Isocrates, there is more than one way after all in which poetry can encode and communicate its 'useful' instructions for life.

There is one further respect in particular, however, in which Isocrates purports to ascribe value to (the best) narrative and mythic poetry. This is its encomiastic exemplarity—its capacity, by means of memorialization and glorification, to provide models of conduct for others to emulate. According to Isocrates, this is no small part of Homer's own greatness. In the *Panegyricus*, in the midst of arguing for a panhellenic campaign against Persia in the 380s, he writes as follows.

It is my view that the poetry of Homer too achieved a greater reputation because it was a glorious encomium of those who made war on the barbarians, and this is why our ancestors wanted to give the poet's artistry pride of place both in their musical contests and in the education of the young, so that by listening frequently to his verses we would never forget the enmity which existed towards the barbarians and, impelled to emulate the outstanding qualities of those who went on that campaign, we would desire to accomplish the same exploits as they did.⁷⁰

We know that Isocrates is here adopting an existing template for the educational value of poetry; the similarity, for instance, to the description in Plato's *Protagoras* of poetry's educational uses (with

⁶⁹ The verb *ποιεῖν* in this same sentence also implies an element of imaginative fiction: 'Homer has made the gods' (*Ὁμηρος . . . τοὺς θεοὺς πεποίηκεν*) amounts to 'Homer has poetically represented them as'.

⁷⁰ Isoc. 4.159: οἶμαι δὲ καὶ τὴν Ὀμήρου ποίησιν μείζω λαβεῖν δόξαν, ὅτι καλῶς τοὺς πολέμησαντας τοῖς βαρβάροις ἐνεκωμίασε, καὶ διὰ τοῦτο βουλευθῆναι τοὺς προγόνους ἡμῶν ἐντιμον αὐτοῦ ποιῆσαι τὴν τέχνην ἐν τε τοῖς τῆς μουσικῆς ἄθλοις καὶ τῇ παιδεύσει τῶν νεωτέρων, ἵνα πολλάκις ἀκούοντες τῶν ἐπῶν ἐκμανθάνωμεν τὴν ἔχθραν τὴν ὑπάρχουσαν πρὸς αὐτοὺς καὶ ζηλοῦντες τὰς ἀρετὰς τῶν στρατευσαμένων τῶν αὐτῶν ἔργων ἐκείνοις ἐπιθυμῶμεν. The verb *ἐκμανθάνειν* ('never forget' in my tr.) plays on the idea of learning poetry by heart (e.g. Pl. *Prt.* 325e, *Hp. mai.* 285e, *Aeschin.* 3.135) but also shades into the sense of grasping the (supposed) meaning: cf. Pl. *Ion* 530c, with Ch. 4 n. 26. On the significance of Homer as a panhellenic poet in this passage, see Graziosi 2002: 197 (though 'decreed' seems a mistranslation).

‘encomia’ of men of the past arousing a desire for emulation in the young) is obvious.⁷¹ But that template, itself an extension of an archaic but not unproblematic association between song and ‘re-nown’ (*kleos*),⁷² provides only an outline agenda; it still leaves individual passages and works in need of specific interpretation. What is most significant about Isocrates’ use of it to enlist Homer for his anti-barbarian cause is, however, the superficiality and insensitivity of the reading of the *Iliad* it implies: a vast work of narrative, psychological, and ethical complexity is reduced at a stroke to the single (and spurious) goal of encouraging Greeks to perpetuate hatred of ‘Asiatic’ peoples. So much for the Homeric depiction of, among other things, Hector, Andromache, Hecabe, and Priam!

The essential point to be made here is that Isocrates’ narrow construal of poetry’s encomiastic exemplarity is in effect a negation of the narrative-cum-imaginative richness of Homeric epic (a richness partly recognized, it seemed, at *To Nicocles* 48–9, a later work) and an attempt to collapse the value of such epic into nothing better than a form of chauvinistic propaganda. It is important to stress that while a general conception of Homer as a ‘poet of war’ had (unsurprisingly) some currency before Isocrates’ time, and while that conception was even carried by some Greeks to the extent of considering Homer an expert teacher of military strategy, Isocrates is going beyond such patterns of argument and engaging in a tendentious hermeneutics which wrenches the *Iliad* into the service of fourth-century politics.⁷³ Those critics of Homer who classified him as an expert on (*inter alia*) warfare were perhaps naively simplifying or abbreviating the status of the *Iliad*’s themes. But Isocrates is deforming the *Iliad*’s world, and its values, for his own purposes.

⁷¹ See Pl. *Prt.* 325e–326a, where the combination of *νουθετήσεις* and *ἐπαινοὶ* at 326a is arguably parallel to my distinction in Isocrates’ case between explicit injunctions and implicit exemplarity in poetry. Cf. e.g. Pl. *Resp.* 8.568b (tragedy’s supposed encomium of tyranny: a highly sarcastic passage), 10.599b (where Socrates, semi-ironically, calls Homer ‘the encomiast’, ὁ ἐγκωμιάζων), *Tim.* 19d (implying that encomium is basic to poetry in general); note the implied idea of ‘emulation’ in Niceratus’ talk of becoming ‘like’ Achilles *et al.* at Xen. *Symp.* 4.6. See Halliwell 1988: 122–3 for further references.

⁷² Cf. Ch. 2, 74–6.

⁷³ The idea of Homer as poet of war is visible at e.g. Ar. *Frogs* 1034–6, in the *Certamen Homeri et Hesiodi* (see Graziosi 2002: 174–7, Rosen 2004: 306–9), and at Pl. *Ion* 540d–541e (cf. Ch. 4, 175–6), *Resp.* 10.599c, 601a, Xen. *Symp.* 4.6.

It is my contention that the *Panegyricus*' warped view of the *Iliad* reflects a larger failure on Isocrates' part to come to terms with different kinds and possibilities of poetic value. I take this failure, furthermore, to be symptomatic of a tension between Isocrates' conception of poetry and of his own work. We have seen that he regards poetry and (formal) prose as sections of a continuum, not as radically disjunct practices, and is happy not only to compare poets with intellectuals like himself but sometimes to treat poets as a subgroup of 'experts' or 'sages' (σοφισταί).⁷⁴ His insistently pragmatic test of both poetry and prose is its 'utility', what is educationally, politically, and culturally 'useful' (χρήσιμος) or 'beneficial' (ὠφέλιμος) about it; and he treats the discursive means of conveying such utility as belonging to two main types: the modes, respectively, of 'showing' and 'telling', i.e. narrative/mythic illustration and memorializing exemplarity on the one hand, instructive injunctions (including gnomic utterances) on the other.⁷⁵ Isocrates' own writings, which relentlessly proclaim their own utility, use variants of both modes. But the balance of his work tilts towards the second of them, in part because even in his appeals to myth he characteristically prefers the drily edifying résumé to any kind of imaginative vividness or dramatic immediacy. In the *Panathenaicus* he looks back on his early aversion to 'elaborately mythologized' (μυθώδεις) ways of writing, which he equates (or closely associates) with those 'full of sensationalism and false pretensions'.⁷⁶ Since we know from the important passage at *To Nicocles* 48–9 (291 above) that *muthôdês*, 'elaborately [even fictionally] mythologized', is how Isocrates chooses to describe the subject-matter of both Homeric epic and Athenian tragedy, the distancing of his self-image as writer from this point on the spectrum of *logoi* is a way, among other things, of dissociating himself from the dynamics

⁷⁴ Cf. n. 48 above. One kind of precedent for this view is Protagoras' appropriation of Homer and other poets as crypto-sophists, *Pl. Prt.* 316d.

⁷⁵ I am here adjusting the familiar narratological contrast between showing and telling—usually, of course, a distinction *within* the category of narrative.

⁷⁶ 12.1, τοὺς τερατείας καὶ ψευδολογίας μεστούς. On the adj. μυθώδης see 291–4 and n. 63 above. τερατεία evokes, for Isocrates, the realm of the showy but useless; see 12.77, 15.269(?), 285, and cf. Ch. 5 n. 51. Isocrates uses ψευδολογία terms to denote various types of intellectual pretension, bad faith, and slander (10.8, 12.21, 78, 15.136), though 12.246 (a pupil speaking) curiously denotes something more like imaginative invention. For Isocrates' own uses of myth, cf. n. 61 above.

of poetic narrativity and imagination. Isocrates the pragmatist aligns himself with traditions of public speech which include the poets, but unlike some of his rivals, including Plato, he resists the temptation to assimilate himself too closely to them.⁷⁷ And if my argument has been on the right lines, it is a correlate of that resistance that he feels the need to hold at arm's length the psychological power of poetry in its own right.

There is one other passage which throws into relief the tension set up at *To Nicocles* 48–9, and elsewhere, between Isocratean paradigms of pragmatic utility (the exclusive self-justification of his own work but only a partial/intermittent virtue of poetry) and psychagogic gratification (the one thing which it seems that poetry but not Isocrates' own discourse can yield). This is the cynical reference to emotions felt by poetic audiences which intrudes itself rather abruptly into the *Panegyricus* at the point where Isocrates, developing his case for a panhellenic expedition against Persia, highlights the extent of contemporary sufferings and upheavals (the consequences of 'wars and factions', 167) across the Greek world of the 380s. Claiming that no one, least of all the leaders of Greece's cities, seems as troubled by this state of affairs as he himself is, Isocrates draws the following contrast.

None of these things [sc. illegal executions, exiles, poverty, etc.] has yet aroused anyone's indignation. Indeed, people think it right to weep over the disasters composed by the poets, yet when they look on the many terrible sufferings being caused by war they are so far from feeling pity that they actually derive more pleasure from one another's misfortunes than from their personal prosperity.⁷⁸

This fascinating passage, which anticipates a view whose modern adherents include Rousseau, alludes most obviously to the audiences of tragedy, and perhaps of epic recitals as well. A similar passage in a

⁷⁷ Ostwald and Lynch (1994: 597) wrongly claim that Isocrates uses the noun *ποιητής* (standardly 'poet') to describe his own status as author; this appears a basic misunderstanding of the phrase *λόγους ποιείσθαι* at 12.11.

⁷⁸ Isoc. 4.168: *ὑπὲρ ὧν οὐδεὶς πώποτ' ἡγανάκτησεν, ἀλλ' ἐπὶ μὲν ταῖς συμφοραῖς ταῖς ὑπὸ τῶν ποιητῶν συγκειμέναις δακρύειν ἀξιοῦσιν, ἀληθινὰ δὲ πάθη πολλὰ καὶ δεινὰ γιγνόμενα διὰ τὸν πόλεμον ἐφορῶντες τοσούτου δέουσιν ἐλεεῖν ὥστε καὶ μᾶλλον χαίρουσιν ἐπὶ τοῖς ἀλλήλων κακοῖς ἢ τοῖς αὐτῶν ἰδίοις ἀγαθοῖς*. On the term *συμφορά*, 'disaster', in this context, cf. n. 66 above.

speech of pseudo-Andocides, probably from later in the fourth century, refers explicitly to tragic theatre.⁷⁹

As that last reference bears out, it is unlikely that Isocrates' observation was peculiar to him. One might even detect a partially cognate subtext in Socrates' remarks in *Republic* 10 on how 'even the best of us' yield to impulsive pity in the theatre (when, by implication, they would not usually do so outside it), though Socrates' larger argument is designed to question whether any simple psychological separation between theatre and 'life' can be maintained.⁸⁰ But Isocrates' critique acquires a particular force against the background of his general conception of poetry. Where Plato, using the inwardness of Socrates' dramatized persona, expresses acknowledgement of, as well as anxiety about, the peculiar power of theatrical experience, Isocrates turns the point in a cynical direction: he makes the emotions and tears produced by poetry sound like a self-indulgence disconnected from (what ought to be) the pragmatic requirements of the real world. In consequence, where Plato sees a profound *problem* about how the mind behaves inside and outside the theatre (or, equally, in relation to Homeric epic), Isocrates posits, it seems, a fissure between psychagogic 'ecstasy' and political 'truth'.

If Isocrates on occasion voices admiration for the ability of Homer and the tragedians to absorb their audiences in narratives of mythological conflict and excitement, he does not find in the effects of this ability any complex challenge to understanding the needs of the soul. Furthermore, we have also seen that he prioritizes instructiveness—whether through directly gnomic utterance or, more obliquely, through (supposed) narrative exemplarity—over the emotional and dramatic properties with which poetry draws its audiences into intensely imagined worlds of experience. We can now see, in addition, that tragedy is particularly awkward to accommodate within this framework of Isocratean principles. In so far as tragedy is preoccupied with arousing

⁷⁹ [Andoc.] 4.23 ('when you see such things in tragedy . . . , but when you watch them happening in the city'): see my discussion in Halliwell 2002: 213–14 (cf. 113–14), with *ibid.* 214–15 (cf. 96) for Rousseau's position on theatrical emotion. For traces of such views later in antiquity, note esp. Lucian, *Tox.* 9 (put into the mouth of a Scythian observer of Greeks, and with a striking analogy to the tragic actor's discarded mask).

⁸⁰ Pl. *Resp.* 10.605c–d; see Ch. 4, 186, 201–2. For the idea that tragic spectators might yield to pity *only* in the theatre, cf. Nietzsche's model of tragic audiences in *Daybreak* 172, with Halliwell (2003c).

pity for appalling extremes of suffering, as *Panegyricus* 168 seems to accept, it is difficult to perceive what benefit it could do its audiences that would satisfy Isocrates' 'pragmatic' standards. One conceivable benefit—a deepening of sensitivity to suffering in the real world—is of course precisely rejected in the *Panegyricus* passage. This means that if Isocrates is to attach substantial cultural value at all to tragedy, it will have to be in virtue of its implicit exemplarity: its representation, more specifically, of heroes who somehow rise above, or achieve things in the face of, their suffering.

Passages in the *Evagoras* and *Antidosis* do indeed confirm that Isocrates was able to think of tragedy as implicitly if paradoxically encomiastic—as a genre which 'hymns' or 'celebrates' the figures whose lives it dramatizes, even where those lives centre on suffering.⁸¹ In this respect he may have been aligning his views in part with an older conception of tragedy, reflected (and exposed to comic subversion) in the Aeschylus figure of Aristophanes' *Frogs*. Aeschylus, in the contest with Euripides, locates the heart of the genre not in its pity-inducing qualities or its resources for bringing audiences imaginatively close to the characters, but rather in the inspiring 'uplift' of its affirmation of militaristic heroism, not least against the barbarians.⁸² Yet Isocrates, as we have seen, places limits on any such conception of the genre; for him, emotions experienced in the theatre can be observed to make little difference to people's behaviour in their own social and political world. Tragedy, it seems, whatever power it may wield over the mind in its self-contained domain, can never fully satisfy the pragmatist test of value—the test of directly orientating lives for the better in the 'real' world—to which all *logos* must submit.

But can any poetry adequately pass this test in Isocrates' eyes? To do so, it will clearly need to stay close to its instructive functions, providing either explicit injunctions (like Hesiod, Theognis, and Phocylides: 290 above) or unequivocally admirable models for

⁸¹ Isoc. 9.6, 15.136–7: both passages use *ὑμνεῖν* in the sense 'hymn', 'celebrate', 'sing the praises of', in close conjunction with *τραγωδεῖν*, the latter signifying 'turn into material for tragic poetry' but also with overtones here of 'give tragic grandeur to' *vel sim*. The implications of heroic exemplarity are reinforced by the fuller vocabulary of encomium at 9.5–6: *ἐπαινεῖν*, *κοσμεῖν* (cf. Ch. 2 n. 52), *εὐλογεῖν*.

⁸² See esp. Ar. *Frogs* 1021–2 for Aeschylus' embodiment of this position, with Ch. 3 n. 55 for the contrast in *Frogs* between pity-related and heroically 'affirmative' conceptions of tragedy.

emulation. The prose–poetry continuum of *logos* is a medium underpinned, for Isocrates, by a fundamental ‘utility’, including the framing of ideals in the form of encomium.⁸³ But the continuum has a verbal and a substantive dimension, involving both ‘style’ (*lexis*) and ‘thought’ (*enthumēmata*).⁸⁴ In both these respects Isocrates regards poetry as having greater freedom than prose, a freedom which does not, however, contribute directly, if at all, to pragmatic utility. In contrasting the two forms of *logos* in the *Evagoras* (of c. 365) Isocrates puts the point as follows:

Poets are allowed many kinds of embellishment. They can make the gods enter the human world, speaking to and collaborating with whomsoever they wish; and they can relate such things not just in standard language but with loan words, coinages, and metaphors: there is nothing, indeed, they need do without; they can give rich variety to their poetry with every form of language. But prose writers have no such freedoms; they must restrict themselves entirely to the vocabulary of ordinary civic discourse, and use thoughts which belong to the nature of actual human behaviour. What’s more, poets compose everything in metrical rhythms, which are completely unavailable to prose writers; and this property exercises so much charm that even if poems are defective in style and thought, they can nevertheless entrance their hearers with their fine rhythms and formal symmetries.⁸⁵

There is, no doubt, an element of wistful envy here, and to that extent a genuine acknowledgement of the scope of both the verbal and imaginative resources of poetry. What’s more, Isocrates elsewhere admits to having had a leaning, at any rate for part of his career,

⁸³ To teach what is ‘useful’ (*χρήσιμος*) or ‘best’ (*βέλτιστος*) is the shared function of poetry and prose: Isoc. 1.51–2 (cf. n. 48 above), 2.42, 48–9. Encomium, praise *vel sim.* is equally a common factor: 5.109, 9.6–11, 40, 65, 144, 12.35, 15.166 (with my text below), cf. 15.136–7.

⁸⁴ Cf. n. 107 below.

⁸⁵ Isoc. 9.8–10: τοῖς μὲν γὰρ ποιηταῖς πολλοὶ δέδονται κόσμοι· καὶ γὰρ πλησιάζοντας τοὺς θεοὺς τοῖς ἀνθρώποις οἶόν τ’ αὐτοῖς ποιῆσαι καὶ διαλεγομένους καὶ συναγωνιζομένους οἷς ἂν βουληθῶσιν, καὶ περὶ τούτων δηλῶσαι μὴ μόνον τοῖς τεταγμένοις ὀνόμασιν, ἀλλὰ τὰ μὲν ξένοις, τὰ δὲ καινοῖς, τὰ δὲ μεταφοραῖς, καὶ μὴδὲν παραλιπεῖν, ἀλλὰ πᾶσιν τοῖς εἶδεσιν διαποικίλαι τὴν ποίησιν· τοῖς δὲ περὶ τοὺς λόγους οὐδὲν ἕξεσιν τῶν τοιούτων, ἀλλ’ ἀποτόμως καὶ τῶν ὀνομάτων τοῖς πολιτικοῖς μόνον καὶ τῶν ἐνθυμημάτων τοῖς περὶ αὐτὰς τὰς πράξεις ἀναγκαῖόν ἐστιν χρησθαι. πρὸς δὲ τούτοις οἱ μὲν μετὰ μέτρων καὶ ῥυθμῶν ἅπαντα ποιοῦσιν, οἱ δ’ οὐδενὸς τούτων κοινωνοῦσιν· ὁ τοσαύτην ἔχει χάριν ὥστ’, ἂν καὶ τῇ λέξει καὶ τοῖς ἐνθυμήμασιν ἔχη κακῶς, ὅμως αὐταῖς ταῖς εὐρυθμίαις καὶ ταῖς συμμετρίαις ψυχαγωγῶσιν τοὺς ἀκούοντας. Cf. Dover 1997: 96.

towards a partially poeticized manner of writing. In one of his earliest works, *Against the Sophists* (c.390), using terminology akin to the description of poetry in the above passage, he associates himself with a general model of prose-writing which involves an ability to 'give suitable variety with one's thoughts' to a whole discourse and even, in a blurring of the *Evagoras's* strict dichotomy, to write 'with fine and musical rhythms'.⁸⁶ In the *Antidosis* (of 354–3) he boasts of producing speeches on political, panhellenic themes in a manner 'more like works composed with music and rhythm than to forensic speeches', with a 'more poetic and more varied style', and with an attempt to use 'more inventive' thoughts as well as a multiplicity of other forms of writing.⁸⁷ Finally, of his late work *Philip* (of 346) Isocrates says that it lacks the embellishment of attractive rhythms and stylistic variety which he used to employ and teach others when younger, once again allowing himself to apply to his own (earlier) prose evaluative terms which *Evagoras* declares to be the exclusive preserve of poetry.⁸⁸

These admissions of a poeticizing penchant should not, however, be overestimated. For one thing, they attest primarily to a very broad 'musicality' of prose style, including a liking for symmetry, smoothness, and rotundity of phrasing. While traces of Gorgianic influence can be detected here, Isocrates goes much less far than Gorgias in the direction of employing quasi-poetic rhythms or blurring the poetry–prose distinction in more general terms.⁸⁹ Nor do such admissions do much to counteract the central Isocratean impression and conviction

⁸⁶ Isoc. 13.16: ... καὶ τοῖς ἐνθυμήμασι πρεπόντως ὅλον τὸν λόγον καταποικίλαι καὶ τοῖς ὀνόμασιν εὐρύθμως καὶ μουσικῶς εἰπεῖν. Cf. Dover 1997: 183 with n. 62, who cites only 5.27 for the point of quasi-metrical rhythms. Usher (2010) shows that Isocrates' use of marked rhythmical effects was in fact sparing.

⁸⁷ Isoc. 15.46–7: λόγους... Ἑλληνικοὺς καὶ πολιτικοὺς καὶ πανηγυρικοὺς, οὓς ἅπαντες ἂν φήσειαν ὁμοιοτέρους εἶναι τοῖς μετὰ μουσικῆς καὶ ῥυθμῶν πεποιημένοις ἢ τοῖς ἐν δικαστηρίῳ λεγομένοις. καὶ γὰρ τῇ λέξει ποιητικωτέρα καὶ ποικιλωτέρα τὰς πράξεις δηλοῦσιν, καὶ τοῖς ἐνθυμήμασιν ὀγκωδεστέροις καὶ καινότεροις χρῆσθαι ζήτουσιν, ἔτι δὲ ταῖς ἄλλαις ἰδέαις ἐπιφανεστέραις καὶ πλείουσιν ὅλον τὸν λόγον διοικοῦσιν.

⁸⁸ Isoc. 5.27: οὐδὲ γὰρ ταῖς περὶ τὴν λέξιν εὐρυθμίαις καὶ ποικιλίαις κεκοσμήκαμεν αὐτὸν, αἷς αὐτὸς τε νεώτερος ὢν ἐχρῶμεν καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις ὑπέδειξα... Two other passages which speak of 'variety', *poikilia*, in connection with Isocratean prose are 12.4 (referring, like 5.27, to his earlier works), 12.246 (the pupil nonetheless ascribing this quality to *Panath.* itself).

⁸⁹ On Gorgias' style as poetic, including its rhythms, see nn. 9, 11 above. For points of stylistic contact between Isocrates and Gorgias, see Dover 1997: 151, 153–4, with 134, 137 for an important difference; cf. *ibid.* 103–5 on the relative lack of certain poetic features in Isocrates. Isocratean 'smoothness' was noted by Longinus, *Subl.*

that prose can do the job of encomium better than poetry (a claim he is bold enough to assert in a direct self-comparison with Pindar at 15.166) and that whatever the other merits of poetry their effect on the mind is largely independent of the vital work of persuading audiences to adopt certain attitudes and reach certain decisions. We saw earlier that Isocrates regards poetry's psychagogic power, its ability to thrill and transport the mind, as belonging with an impetus towards fictionalization (qua mythologization) and therefore away from the truth-seeking imperatives of the real world. This is not something that the pragmatist can exactly celebrate, and even Homer is accordingly cast in a somewhat cynical light as having preferred 'mass appeal' to moral or political utility.⁹⁰ In the final analysis, then, Isocrates' acknowledgements of poetry's special resources (its imaginative and linguistic freedom) are indelibly coloured with ambivalence. Where Gorgias posited a prose-poetry continuum in which there is an unresolved tension between truth and seductive deception, in Isocrates' case the virtues of poetry must ultimately be subordinated to the educational and political priorities of his own rhetoric. To accept the consequences of that stance for the valuation of poetry is to share Isocrates' remorselessly prosaic view of the world.

PHILODEMUS AND THE ENIGMAS OF POETIC VALUE

On 9 May 1933 the poet and Cambridge Professor of Latin A. E. Housman delivered the Leslie Stephen Lecture under the title 'The Name and Nature of Poetry'. The lecture was published later that same year, but Housman subsequently told a friend he would 'rather forget' it and did not 'wish it to be associated' with him—a wish posterity unfortunately cannot grant.⁹¹ The thesis of the lecture is unashamedly prescriptivist, even if Housman partly obfuscates this point by purporting to concede a plurality of legitimate senses to the

21.1. Overall assessments of Isocrates' style can be found in Norden 1898: i. 113–19, Palmer 1980: 168–71, Usher 1973, 2010.

⁹⁰ See 2.48–9, quoted at 291 above.

⁹¹ See Housman (1988: 349–71) for the text of the lecture, with Ricks's editorial note *ibid.* 507 for Housman's subsequent regrets.

word 'poetry'.⁹² The 'name' and 'nature' of poetry, the thesis runs, are not coextensive; 'poetry', properly understood, does not embrace all the things that are currently *called* poetry. For a start, something can be in verse without being poetry. Verse, for Housman, is a necessary but not sufficient condition of poetry: the latter requires a further 'literary' quality, which he equates with beauty of 'external form', namely diction and rhythm ('pure language and liquid versification'). There is also 'sham' poetry, though it is not entirely clear whether this should be thought of just as bad poetry or not as poetry at all. Housman's prescriptivism tends towards the equation of 'poetry' with 'good poetry', but he evidently thinks some poems better than others and thus has no obvious reason to exclude bad poems from the category of poetry *per se*. The 'peculiar function' of poetry, what it achieves at its finest, is 'to transfuse emotion': that is, 'to set up in the reader's sense [*sic*] a vibration corresponding to what was felt by the writer'.⁹³

For the purposes of his main argument, Housman endeavours to sever emotion from thought: the definition just quoted is preceded by the negative qualification, 'not to transmit thought but...' How, though, can emotion be wholly detached from thought? Housman is even prepared to count some good poetry as *without* thought altogether, literally as 'nonsense'; and he is content to regard poetry as 'more physical than intellectual' (hence his notorious shiver-down-the-spine-while-shaving test of poetic authenticity). Yet he himself wavers, not to say becomes confused, about the emotion/thought disjunction. He tells us, for instance, that Shakespeare's 'thought' and 'meaning' has 'power of itself to move us', where 'move' presumably implies an emotional effect. He also speaks of poetry 'quicken[ing] perception' and 'sharpen[ing] discrimination', phrases which imply a necessarily cognitive dimension to the experience of poetry. And he is prepared to concede that at least sometimes the 'feeling' of poetic expression is 'composite', with thought and emotion 'blend[ing] indistinguishably'.⁹⁴

⁹² Ibid., esp. 351, 353. But this seeming semantic pluralism is undermined by the core of the lecture's argument.

⁹³ Ibid. 352 ('transfuse emotion', 'external form'), 354 ('sham poetry').

⁹⁴ Ibid. 350 ('quicken... perception' etc.), 366 ('meaning has power of itself to move us'; 'nonsense' as poetry), 369 ('composite' of feeling and thought; 'more physical than intellectual'), 369–70 (the shaving test).

Housman's dilemma (and his undoing) stems from the fact that he does not want poetic value to be equivalent to the value of the thoughts, ideas, or subject-matter of poetry, since he is aware that, in a certain sense, any thought, idea, or subject-matter found in poetry could in principle occur outside poetry too. He reasons, therefore, that poetic value cannot be equivalent to something that is not exclusively poetic. 'Poetry', he pronounces, 'is not the thing said but a way of saying it', and the force of the latter, as we have seen, is explained in terms of the transmission of emotion. On the other hand, Housman nowhere addresses the consideration that 'emotion' too is not exclusive to poetry: many kinds of prose (including various sorts of religious, political, and rhetorical writings, not to mention the novel) set themselves to 'transfuse' emotion from author to reader. The only thing that is properly exclusive to poetry, on Housman's own premises, is verse form, and that, as we have seen, comes nowhere near satisfying his desire for an adequate account of the nature of poetry. The result of these difficulties is that large cracks appear in the normative foundations of Housman's thesis. If, for example, certain passages of Shakespeare 'fill[ed] . . . with thought' are 'greater and more moving poems' yet *not* 'more poetical' than other passages which are 'nonsense . . . but . . . ravishing poetry',⁹⁵ it seems that thought can make something more moving than emotion-without-thought. But what, once again, does 'moving' mean if not emotionally communicative? Certainly Housman does not explain this ambiguity in his argument. It also seems that poetic greatness, yet not 'poeticity' *per se*, may ultimately depend on more than emotion. No wonder then that Housman declares at a late stage, almost despairingly, that he 'could no more define poetry than a terrier can define a rat', even though his whole lecture has been an exercise in normative definition.⁹⁶ And no wonder, perhaps, that he subsequently felt he would 'rather forget' the lecture altogether.

Housman's dilemma is not only worth pondering in its own right by anyone who wants to grapple with the problem of accounting for poetic value. It can also help to illuminate the related though different (in fact in some ways, as we shall see, the *opposite*) dilemma which faced the late Hellenistic Epicurean philosopher Philodemus in his treatise *On Poems*. I shall accordingly refer back to Housman at

⁹⁵ See Housman (1988: 366). ⁹⁶ Ibid. 369.

several points below. In very broad terms, we can see that Philodemus wished to steer a route between the Scylla of outright moralism (subscribed to by those who equated the value of poetry with edification or ethical benefit) and the Charybdis of outright formalism (represented by extreme euphonists who took the value of poetry to consist entirely in the sensory properties of its language). This intention has something subtly in common with Housman's undertaking in 'The Name and Nature of Poetry'. But just as Housman becomes, at the very least, unstable in his attempt to define a quintessence of 'the poetic', so we may wonder whether the polemical vigour with which Philodemus rejects the critical tenets of others traps him in an impossible quest for a theory of pure poetic value which is at the same time not reductively formalist. Part of the purpose of my argument in this section is to show that even after we have allowed for the immense uncertainties which the fragmentary survival of Philodemus' texts generates (and there is uncertainty almost every step of the way), we need to be alert to difficulties in his position which may not be susceptible to definitive solution.

Consider the following summary by one contemporary specialist in Philodemian studies. 'Philodemus argues that what makes a poem good is not the sound . . . but the combination of thought and words . . . Philodemus claims that poems as such, that is, as metrical verbal compositions, do not have any educational usefulness. Any educational utility resides in their content, which poems share with prose.'⁹⁷ If we take this paraphrase for the moment as reliable, a cluster of questions prompt themselves. How can something (educational utility) reside in the 'content' of poems without contributing to their value (to what makes them 'good')? Or how can a poem's combination of 'thought and words' (which determines its value) be independent of its 'content' (which seemingly does not)? And how can one even talk about poems 'as such' without talking in part about their 'content'?

We might start to tackle these perplexities by considering a striking similarity between one of Housman's principles and a passage from book 1 of Philodemus' *On Poems*.⁹⁸ Housman, as we saw, states that

⁹⁷ Asmis 1990a: 2404.

⁹⁸ In what follows, book 1 is cited from the invaluable edition of Janko (2000), book 5 from Mangoni (1993), in both cases with book, column, and line numbers. Janko (2011) unfortunately appeared only as my own book was going to press.

‘poetry is not the thing said but a way of saying it’. In Philodemus, we encounter the remark that ‘it is not the function of poets to say what no one else could, but to say things in a way which no non-poet does’.⁹⁹ This remark (which might also put us in mind of Housman’s denial that there are any such things as specifically or specially ‘poetical ideas’) is actually quoted by Philodemus, but with explicit approval, from another critic, apparently the now little-known Andromenides.¹⁰⁰ It is coupled, however, with Philodemus’ disapproval for the same critic’s statement that ‘this function will be achieved if the poet selects the more beautiful words of those applicable to the subject, and avoids uglier ones’.¹⁰¹ Philodemus’ disapproval seems to be aimed at the supposition that verbal or stylistic beauty, understood by Andromenides in partly but not wholly euphonist terms, is a sufficient condition of poetic quality. Philodemus is not prepared to accept this; he requires something more, even though the first part of the passage just cited shows that he is happy to concur with Andromenides in denying the existence of any specifically poetic subject-matter or forms of thought (‘to say what no one else could’).¹⁰² It follows from the combination of his agreement and disagreement with Andromenides’ statements that Philodemus believes there is a distinctively poetic ‘way of saying’ things but that this is irreducible to the choice or properties of language alone, i.e. of words in themselves.

Elsewhere, in book 2 of *On Poems*, we know that Philodemus formulated this aspect of his position by saying that ‘we all conceive of poetry not as humming and twanging but as a matter of linguistic expressions which signify thought by being composed in a certain

⁹⁹ ποητῶν ἔργον ἐστὶν οὐ λέγειν ὃ μηδεὶς, ἀλλ’ οὕτως εἰπεῖν ὡς οὐδεὶς τῶν μὴ ποητῶν. Phld. *Poem.* 1.167.16–20 = Andromenides F18 (Janko 2000: 148); cf. Phld. *Poem.* 1.131.8–12. Except where uncertainty affects my argument directly, I quote Philodemus’ Greek without indicating textual corrections and supplements.

¹⁰⁰ Andromenides’ views are reconstructed by Janko (2000: 143–54), whose fragment (F) numbers are used below. See Housman (1988: 364) for the denial of ‘poetical ideas’.

¹⁰¹ γενήσεσθαι τοῦργον, ἂν τὰ καλλίω τῶν κατ’ αὐτοῦ τιθεμένων ῥήματ’ ἐκλέγῃται, τὰ δ’ αἰσχύω περιστήται. Phld. *Poem.* 1.167.20–5 = Andromenides F21 Janko.

¹⁰² Janko (2000: 148, 383 n. 4) thinks Andromenides is directly echoing Isoc. 4.10. Possibly, but their points are not the same. Isocrates stresses originality qua the rare ability of individuals like himself to give novel, improved treatment to existing subjects; Andromenides emphasizes the function of poets in general to discover beauties of expression not available to prose-writers. My interpretation of Andromenides’ first principle (‘not to say what no one else could’), and of Philodemus’ agreement with it, also differs from Janko’s (383 n. 4).

way'.¹⁰³ Part of the force of that formulation is a denial that elements of language treated independently of sense or meaning, i.e. language as pure sound, can satisfy a correct conception of poetry. Philodemus, we can infer, would not have been at all happy with Housman's acceptance (noted above) of certain passages as 'nonsense' yet 'ravishing poetry', though he might have been slightly less scornful of such a view, given Housman's addition of 'emotion' to the equation, than of the euphonist stance which discerned poetic beauty in sound alone.¹⁰⁴ As it stands, however, Philodemus' formulation, with its rhetorically manipulative 'we all', fails to get beyond the insistence that both compositional 'form' and semantic 'content' are essential to poetry. The negative force of the proposition in response to representatives of an extreme formalism is not matched, in other words, by any positive indication of what the claim purports to tell us about poetry. Philodemus avows that there is a distinctively poetic 'way of saying things', a way which involves both the linguistic medium *and* the 'things said'. But since something comparable (and comparably vague) might be said about certain non-poetic forms of discourse, are we any the wiser?¹⁰⁵

To get past this initial barrier, we need to recognize that Philodemus is attempting to intervene in (not to say slash his way through) a very crowded, fractious field of critical discourse and poetic theory. The number and range of critics he deals with in *On Poems* cannot be reconstructed in full, but a sufficient measure of it can be gleaned from the fact that he ended the treatise with a compressed synthesis of more than a dozen poetic theories.¹⁰⁶ As Philodemus presents it, this arena of theorizing was located at the intersection of two axes

¹⁰³ τὸ πόημα πάντες οὐχ ὡς τερέτισμα καὶ κρούμα νοοῦμεν, ἀλλὰ λέξεις ἐκ τοῦ πως συντίθεσθαι διανόημα σημαίνουσας: *PHerc.* 1074b fr. 21 + 1081b fr. 8 sup. 6–11 (Tr. C fr. c col. 2.6–11 Sbordone), from *Phld. Poem.* book 2; see Janko 2000: 419 n. 6, with 430 n. 1.

¹⁰⁴ I say 'might have been': much depends on what we take 'emotion' to mean in Housman's lecture; he is very unclear about this (see my text above). In so far as 'emotion' implicitly smuggles back in a kind of sense, it might amount to a form of *ψυχαγωγία* (see my text below) and therefore, in Philodemus' terms, at least a compromise. But if it is taken as a purely physical response, as Housman sometimes seems to suggest, Philodemus would presumably count it every bit as bad as euphonism.

¹⁰⁵ Philodemus himself criticizes on such grounds quite similar statements by other critics at e.g. *Poem.* 5.30.6–16.

¹⁰⁶ *Phld. Poem.* 5.29–39 Mangoni: Asmis (1992b), written before Mangoni's edn appeared, remains a helpful analysis of this part of the work. Note that I use 'critic' to mark the general category of those, including Philodemus himself, concerned with the

of debate. One of these, which we have already noticed, involved disagreement over whether, or how far, poetry's value (excellence, 'goodness') could be traced to purely linguistic/stylistic features (euphonic sound, word-choice, composition, etc.) or required reference to sense, meaning, or 'thought'. A distinction between linguistic form and semantic content—designated respectively by *λέξις*, *σύνθεσις*, etc., and *διάνοια*, *πράγματα*, *ὑπόθεσις* etc., though precise usage is variable—was certainly not invented by Hellenistic critics, but it does seem to have acquired a new edge in this period as a means of accentuating the slant of, and the divergences between, particular poetic theories.¹⁰⁷ The other axis of debate, which is especially important for the thematics of the present book, plots the difference between the idea of poetic value as *sui generis* (rooted in a self-contained experience) or, alternatively, as carrying with it some form of larger 'benefit' to its audience or reader.

It is vital to see that these two axes of argument are strictly independent of one another and can in principle be combined with various permutations. It is open, for instance, to both the euphonist and Philodemus, despite disagreement over the relationship between language and sense, to regard the value of poetic experience as *sui generis* rather than a form of 'benefit', though I propose to argue that Philodemus himself adopts a rather subtly disguised compromise in this respect. The complexity (or sometimes confusion) which arises at the intersection of the two axes is increased by the intrinsic fluidity of the concept of 'benefit', a fluidity too often neglected by

'judgement' (*κρίσις*) of poetry, at the level of either particular works or principles/theories of poetic value; for token instances of the vocabulary of *κρίσις* in Philodemus see e.g. *Poem*. 1.27.18–19, 130.6–7, 5.23.31–2, 29.9–10. I consequently leave aside the vexed issue of varying Hellenistic usage of the Greek term *κριτικός* itself: on this see Janko 2000: 124–7, 2001: 294–6, Broggiato 2001: 249–50 (on Crates F94), Schenkeveld 1968, Pfeiffer 1968: 157–9, 242.

¹⁰⁷ Asmis (1990b: 148, cf. 153) calls the distinction between thought and linguistic structure 'a new division' in Hellenistic criticism; note the modified claim of Asmis 1991: 9 that it 'goes back to Plato'. But it was already well established by the later 5th cent.: see Ar. *Clouds* 943–4, *Peace* 750, *Frogs* 1059. For 4th-cent. usage (with reference to poetry, rhetoric, or language in general) see Lysias 10.7, Alcidas, *Soph.* 33, Pl. *Ion* 530b–c, *Resp.* 3.392c (with a particular focus on narrative/dramatic mode: Halliwell 2009a), Isoc. 9.10–11, Arist. *Rh.* 3.1, 1403b15–20, 1404a19, 3.10, 1410b27–8, Aeschin. 3.136. On the possibility of a form/content distinction at Pl. *Ap.* 22b, see Ch. 4, 160–4. Porter (1995) explores some of the complexity in this conceptual area.

modern historians of Greek poetics and one which merits a brief digression here.

The Greek vocabulary of *ὠφελία* and its cognates denotes a capacity to be of benefit or to do good, but the character of such benefit, where poetry is concerned, is not a simple *donnée*. The idea of poetic 'benefit' or utility can cover ethical edification, factual, technical, or intellectual informativeness, and more besides; nor are the differences between such categories always a matter of sharply drawn boundaries, as we saw with the Isocratean version of utility considered earlier in this chapter.¹⁰⁸ When Thucydides, drawing an implied contrast with poetry, speaks of the materials of his history as 'useful' (*ὠφέλιμα*) for those who wish to consider carefully the true nature of past events and the underlying factors which will make comparable things happen again in the future, he is clearly speaking of the 'benefit' of deeper understanding or insight; but he does not imply that those who acquire it will be 'better' people.¹⁰⁹ The value of history for Thucydides is tied essentially to notions of truth and accuracy; whatever benefit, if any, he might have been prepared to attribute to poetry would be of some other kind. When, however, in Aristophanes' *Frogs* Aeschylus claims that all the noblest poets of the past have been 'beneficial' (*ὠφέλιμοι*, 1031), he does so to support (in part) the proposition that poets can 'improve' or 'make better' their fellow citizens (1009–10).¹¹⁰ Even so, he proceeds to name individual poets as teachers of what sounds like a mixture of the factual and the prescriptive: Orpheus for religious rituals and prohibitions, Musaeus for medical cures and oracles, Hesiod for agricultural instructions, and Homer for 'marshallings of troops, displays of valour, armings of men'.¹¹¹

What's more, the Aeschylus of *Frogs* allows for poetry to exercise ethical benefit (or harm) not just through direct instruction but through a kind of implicit, persuasive exemplarity (to use a term

¹⁰⁸ See 287–92 above.

¹⁰⁹ Thuc. 1.22.4, correctly interpreted by Hornblower 1991: 61. On Thucydides' attitude to poetry, see Ch. 1, 19–24.

¹¹⁰ See Ch. 3, 122–4, for what this much-discussed passage of *Frogs* does and does not amount to. For the idea of poetry making people 'better', cf. n. 47 above.

¹¹¹ *Frogs* 1032–6, tr. from Dover 1993: 322. 'Benefit' from Homeric poetry is also a mixture of the technical and the ethical in Niceratus' speech at Xen. *Symp.* 4.6–7, in a semi-comic context.

I earlier applied to Isocrates):¹¹² that is, by presenting characters and situations which serve as paradigms for the audience. In his own case Aeschylus boasts that a play like *Seven against Thebes* turned the Athenians into brave fighters. In context the argument has a comic resonance, I believe, of self-parody.¹¹³ But it illustrates a principle which clearly had and continued to have currency. The same principle underlies passages in Plato where the criterion of poetic benefit is invoked. When Socrates, in the *Republic*, calls Homeric descriptions of Hades 'neither true nor beneficial to those whose future role is to be good at fighting' (3.386b–c), the process of benefit, or its absence, seems to operate independently of (here, religious) 'truth'. It is a product, rather, of the normative authority attaching to the behaviour and psychology of certain characters. Just as Aeschylus in *Frogs* thinks the warlike, death-confronting mentality of the heroes in *Seven* 'taught' spectators to be brave and militaristic, so the Platonic Socrates suggests that the depressing view of Hades voiced by Achilles in *Odyssey* 11 will, because of the hero's putatively exemplary status, imprint a fear of death on audiences of Homeric epic.¹¹⁴

So to judge poetic value by the criterion of 'benefit' could mean, already in the classical period, a number of different things, including provision of factual information, prescriptive instruction (either in specific domains or for life as a whole), and a kind of emotionally subliminal persuasion. The suppleness of the concept is tellingly illustrated by a comic fragment from the fourth-century playwright Timocles, in which the benefit of tragedy is traced back to the fact that its spectators are put into a position to contemplate how others have suffered much worse things than themselves. Such contemplation allegedly helps individuals to bear their own misfortunes more easily, fortifying them for the endurance of life's many hardships. The fragment breaks down the benefit further into a complementary pair of aspects: first, the experience of being taken outside oneself (the verb is *ψυχαγωγεῖν*) by the emotional intensity of a play during its performance; second, an 'educational' effect (the verb is *παιδεύειν*)

¹¹² See 296–7 above.

¹¹³ See my discussion in Ch. 3, 124–5.

¹¹⁴ When Socrates appeals further to 'benefit' later in the same argument, *Resp.* 3.398b, he is inclined to suppose that it may require an austere kind of art (cf. the contrast between pleasure and benefit at *Grg.* 501–3, with *ibid.* 474d–e); but the same is not true at 401c, still less at the conclusion of the discussion of poetry in book 10, 607d–e, where Socrates longs for a fusion of utility and 'pleasure': see Ch. 4, 203–4.

which is taken from the theatre back into life.¹¹⁵ Even after one has allowed for comic exaggeration of the theme (detectable in the speaker's glibness), it is striking that the benefit posited here straddles the distinction between the direct experience of the poetic work and its lasting impact on the minds of spectators.

There is justification, then, for supposing that the category of 'benefit' could in principle be made to embrace almost any way in which poetry might be thought to 'be good' for hearers or readers, or capable of making them 'better' people.¹¹⁶ That means, in turn, that when a critic *denies* that poetry provides 'benefit', we should always be prepared to ask exactly what is being ruled out, and what, in consequence, is being allowed to remain within the scope of poetic value. One of the first voices we hear explicitly questioning the idea of poetic benefit is the anonymous author of a fragmentary work of the late fifth or early fourth century found in an Oxyrynchus papyrus. He states that he has 'heard many people say that it is beneficial to keep the company of the poems of our ancestors', and it looks as though his purpose is to contest a plethora of views that were couched in such terms.¹¹⁷ His work apparently (and sceptically) links prevailing claims of poetic benefit to subjects which include ethical and religious matters, as well as 'the lineage(?) of human beings' (γονῆς ἀνθρώπων) and the general category of 'ways of living' ('practices', ἐπιτηδεύματα).¹¹⁸ It has plausibly been proposed in fact that the

¹¹⁵ Timocles fr. 6.8–19, with commentary in Olson 2007: 169–72; cf. Ch. 1, 8–9. On *psuchagōgia*, see 324–5 with n. 155 below. Contrast the sharp separation between pleasure/emotional impact (τέρψις, ἔκπληξις) and 'benefit' (ὠφέλεια) with reference, respectively, to written and improvised oratory (the former compared to visual works of art), at Alcidas, *Soph.* 28 (cf. 33): 'benefit' here denotes a practical capacity to achieve things by winning political and legal arguments.

¹¹⁶ Note Aristotle's view that music should be pursued for 'several benefits', including catharsis, *Pol.* 8.7, 1341b36–41; cf. n. 124 below, and see Ch. 5, 242, 253. For general philosophical equations of 'benefit' with doing good to, or being good for, see e.g. *Pl. Resp.* 2.379b, 10.608e (further references in Halliwell 1988: 159–60), *Arist. Top.* 6.9, 147a34, *Eth. Nic.* 1.6, 1096b15.

¹¹⁷ ἥδη γὰρ [πολ]λὼν ἤκουσα [ὧς] ἔστιν ὠφέλιμ[ον το]ῖς ποιήμασιν [ὁμιλ]εῖν ἃ οἱ πρότε[ροι κα]τέλειπον: *POxy.* III 414, col. I.8–13, text also in Lanata 1963: 214 (ascribed to Antiphon), Giuliano 1998: 163 (cf. 119–24); cf. Ch. 3, 123–4 with n. 53, Ch. 4 n. 29. For the idea of 'keeping company' (ὁμιλεῖν) with poetry, note *Pl. Resp.* 10.605b, with Halliwell 2002a: 87–9, Giuliano 1998: 127–8 (though on 128–9 he makes an unfortunate error in including *Ar. Birds* 947 in a list of passages where the vocabulary of poetic 'benefit' occurs).

¹¹⁸ *POxy.* III 414, col. II.17–28, with conjectural emendation; cf. Giuliano 1998: 162–3, Lanata 1963: 216–17.

author is contesting, just as Socrates does in book 10 of Plato's *Republic*, an inclination to treat poets, above all Homer, as quasi-encyclopedic repositories of 'all knowledge'.¹¹⁹ But to challenge such exorbitant claims for poetry need not commit one to ruling out the possibility of poetic benefit altogether. Whatever the anonymous author just mentioned may have believed, the Platonic Socrates of the *Republic* is shown as at any rate holding out a hope that the best poetry might involve a fusion of pleasure and benefit.¹²⁰

Philodemus too falls into the class of those who felt moved to deny the benefit of poetry. But his position in this respect, so far as we can reconstruct it, is not without complications. Given the plurality of inflections which could be given to the idea of poetic benefit or utility, what is it that Philodemus wishes to reject in this regard? One place to look for an answer is the first five columns of book 5 of *On Poems*, where Philodemus attacks views, including those of Heraclides Ponticus, which ascribe 'educational' value to poetry. In column 1, we can see Philodemus stressing that the views of a particular opponent are extreme: 'many philosophers, and especially the greatest,' he says, 'would not count as educational (παιδ]ευτικοί)' if measured by the yardstick in question (*Poem.* 5.1.3–7), and neither rhetoricians nor practitioners of any other educational discipline make equivalent professions of what they can teach. This suggests that Philodemus is here contesting an ascription to (probably Homeric) poetry of an infallible and all-embracing wisdom, something comparable to Homer's supposed knowledge of 'all specialist expertise, everything in the human world which relates to virtue and vice, and everything relating to the gods' at Plato, *Republic* 10.598d–e.¹²¹ If scepticism about such exorbitant claims were all there were to Philodemus' position, it would be a clear-cut matter. The situation, though, is more complicated. In column 3, Philodemus seems to concede that Homer (and other good poets too) 'knew' or 'understood' his subject-matter (πράγματα), but he still questions whether this makes him an

¹¹⁹ Giuliano 1998: 139–42, comparing Pl. *Resp.* 10.598d–e, *Ion* 531c–d, Xen. *Symp.* 4.6 (cf. n. 111 above).

¹²⁰ Pl. *Resp.* 10.607d–e; cf. Ch. 4, 196–203. Pace Giuliano 1998: 145–6, it is far from clear that *POxy.* III 414, col. III.32–5, involves acceptance of poetry's utility to the young; *ibid.* 35–40 (apparently asserting that only another poet can be made 'better' by a poet—i.e. by artistic influence/rivalry?) seems to dispense with the notion of poetic benefit altogether.

¹²¹ Cf. n. 117 above for the critique of similar views in *POxy.* III 414.

‘educational’ writer.¹²² Heraclides Ponticus, by contrast, apparently believes in poetry’s capacity ‘to have a beneficial effect in relation to virtue’ (ὠφελεῖν) . . . πρὸς ἀρετὴν).¹²³ Philodemus expresses some uncertainty, however, about Heraclides’ precise thesis. Indeed, he makes it a complaint against ‘the wretched man’ that ‘although there are multiple forms of benefit, he failed to define which kind should be expected of the poet . . .’¹²⁴ Heraclides *may* (in whatever contexts Philodemus is referring to) have meant ethical benefit, but it is possible that ‘his meaning was different’ (ἄλλως εἶπε, 5.3.32). And the fact that Philodemus makes reference, shortly after this, to medicine, (philosophical) wisdom, linguistic knowledge of dialects, music, geometry, geography, and nautical expertise, does suggest that he is responding to arguments of Heraclides’ which encompassed a wide range of ethical, technical, and philosophical subjects.¹²⁵

If ‘benefit’ was a fluid term of reference where the value of poetry was concerned, Philodemus’ uncertainty about Heraclides’ presuppositions looks entirely warranted. But his own negative position on the issue may be neither self-evident nor impregnable. Not only does he assert, seemingly without argument, that some poems ‘actually bring about harm, indeed very great harm (βλάβην καὶ μεγίστην), so far as lies in their power’ (5.4.18–20); he also tries to refute Heraclides’ use of ‘benefit’ as a necessary condition of poetic value by hypothesizing poetry which might ‘poetically’ relate knowledge-based subject-matter and yet still ‘be of no benefit’ (μηδὲν ὠφελεῖν, 5.5.6–11). The first of those points probably alludes to works depicting mythological scenarios (especially of the underworld) which Epicureans thought contributed to the cultural hold of false models

¹²² *Poem.* 5.3.3–8; the force of the passage is clear enough, despite the poor state of the text.

¹²³ *Poem.* 5.3.28–9; cf. the phrase πρὸς ἀρετὴν ὠφελεῖν at *Phld. Mus.* 4.91.6–7 Delattre (2007a).

¹²⁴ [ἄθ]λιος, ὅτι πολλῶν οὐσῶν ὠφελιῶν οὐ διώρισεν τὴν ποίαν ἀπαιτητέον παρ’ αὐτοῦ . . . : *Poem.* 5.4.1–4, part of Heraclides 116B in Schütrumpf (2008). For the idea of multiple forms of ‘benefit’, cf. *Arist. Pol.* 8.7, 1341b36–8, with n. 116 above. It does not seem likely, pace Asmis 1991: 5, that Heraclides himself explicitly asserted a pluralism of benefit.

¹²⁵ See *Poem.* 5.4.21–5.6.3. Much about Heraclides’ position remains obscure from Philodemus’ evidence; but it does seem likely from *Poem.* 5.4.1–10 that Heraclides tried to answer Socrates’ challenge at *Resp.* 10.607d–e (cf. Ch. 4, 203) by arguing that the best poetry combines intense pleasure (τέρψις) with ethical benefit (ὠφελία).

of reality.¹²⁶ But if some poems do harm (to their audiences' beliefs), why should others not do good? It is logically possible to believe that the first but not the second occurs; it is not, however, psychologically very plausible. As regards the second point above, moreover, Philodemus fails to practise what he preaches; he does not say which of the plural senses of 'benefit' he is using himself: what exactly would be this 'useless' (*ἀνωφελής*, 5.5.6–7) poetic discourse which he hypothesizes? Whatever the faults of Heraclides' poetics may have been, this section of book 5 leaves one with a sense that Philodemus is keener to berate the loose or extravagant arguments of others than to clarify his own diagnostic judgements on poetry's putative benefits or harms, whether ethical, cognitive, emotional, or otherwise.¹²⁷

But do the complications run deeper than inconsistency? Does the complaint that Heraclides failed to specify *which* kind or sense of 'benefit' he was talking about subtly intimate that, if only the specification were careful or guarded enough, even Philodemus himself (who believes that some poems can do harm) might not be wholly unreceptive to the possibility? That way of reading the passage receives some support from a later section of book 5 where Philodemus completes a catalogue of disagreements with Neoptolemus of Parium's poetics by stating that the latter was wrong to ascribe to the supreme poet, over and above the 'entrancement' (*psuchagôgia*) of his hearers, 'a beneficial effect and usefulness of discourse'.¹²⁸ Once again, if Philodemus had simply ruled out any kind of poetic 'benefit' on principle, his own stance would be sharply etched. But he says something more than that. 'Neoptolemus did not take it upon himself', he protests, 'to show that and how [Homer] gives benefit... What kind of benefit and usefulness of discourse should be part of poetry he failed to make clear, so that one might even take him to

¹²⁶ Cf. Epicurus' own notorious description of poetry as a 'fatal ensnarement of myths/stories' (*δᾶθρον μύθων δέλεαρ*): Epicurus fr. 229 Usener; cf. Halliwell 2002a: 277–8. Asmis (1995a: 15–22) gathers the general evidence for Epicurus' views of poetry.

¹²⁷ Cf. Arrighetti 2006: 359–62 on the seeming elusiveness of Philodemus' own poetics. Porter (1996: 625–7) offers one explanation for this. See also the appraisal of Pace (2009).

¹²⁸ *Poem.* 5.16.9–13: 'usefulness of discourse' translates (the probable reading) *χρησιμολογίαν*, a noun which occurs again at *ibid.* 24 but is otherwise not found in surviving Greek. Compare *Poem.* 1.12.23–4 = Andromenides F16 Janko 2000: 147, for 'useful' (*χρήσιμος*) discourse in contrast to poetic enchantment, and cf. *Poem.* 1.34.9–11. On *ψυχαγωγία* see 324–5 below, with n. 155.

mean the benefit of philosophical wisdom (*sophia*) and of other bodies of knowledge'.¹²⁹ At the same time as he complains, once more, about the conceptual vagueness of others, Philodemus creates at least a suspicion that he is uneasy about dismissing talk of 'benefit' *tout court* from the problems of poetics.¹³⁰

In the light of that tentative suggestion, it is worthwhile considering another stretch of *On Poems* 5 where Philodemus seems to wrestle with the challenge of how to avoid a naive ascription of edification to poetry without altogether discarding the idea that it embodies ideas which can reward the mind in reflective, lasting ways. Columns 25–6 of book 5 form part of Philodemus' critique of the views of Crates of Mallos, whose own complex poetics, only imperfectly recoverable from our evidence, included a principle of euphony but also a method of allegorical interpretation.¹³¹ Part of the interest of this passage is that it displays a desire on Philodemus' part to steer a course between a naturalist and a relativist conception of poetic value—between the idea (Crates') of poetry's excellence as 'natural' and the opposing contention (advanced by some of those, their identity uncertain even to Philodemus, whom Crates himself attacked) that there is no 'shared basis of judgement' (*κρίσιν . . . κοινήν*) but only varying 'conventions' for judging poetry.¹³² For Philodemus, there is indeed a 'shared' or 'common' basis of poetic judgement, but it consists not in a directly given natural good (i.e. not in simple pleasure) but in something more complicated which is grounded in a supposedly

¹²⁹ *Poem*. 5.16.15–28.

¹³⁰ The suspicion is reinforced by the partial concessions of 'benefit' to poetry at *Mus.* 4.142.16–21, 143.30–9 Delattre, prompted by Philodemus' polemical need to deny any such benefit to music; on Philodemus' musical aesthetics cf. Delattre (2007*b*). Porter (1996: 619) detects 'ambivalence towards (not outright denial of) the moral utility of poems' in Philodemus.

¹³¹ On various aspects of Crates' poetics, see Janko 2000: 120–34, Janko 1995: 92–6, Asmis 1992*c*, Broggiato 2001: pp. lv–lxv, Porter 1992: 85–114, Halliwell 2002*a*: 274–5.

¹³² *Poem*. 5.25.2–30: Crates criticized those who (probably: Philodemus is unsure) denied any 'natural good' (*φυσικὸν ἀγαθόν*, 18–19) in poetry and allegedly reduced all judgement to relativist 'conventions' (*θέματα*, 2, 24). Cf. Janko (2000: 130–1) for the possibility that Crates' targets were, contrary to Philodemus' disclaimer, certain Epicureans. Since Philodemus himself is talking about a view of 'conventions' as relativist (5.25.23–30), it is impossible, *contra* Asmis 1991: 10, that he has in mind Plato's 'stipulative approach to poetic goodness'. The translation of *παρ' ἄλλοις* (5.25.28–9) as 'for some kinds [sc. of poetry]' at Armstrong 1995*b*: 264, making the principle in question a matter of rules for various genres, is impossible.

given 'preconception' (see below) of what poetry is. In explanation of his position, he proceeds as follows:

Indeed, poetry as such provides no natural benefit from either its style or its thought. For this reason, the goals of poetic excellence are given by our underlying conceptions: in verbal form, to give a mimetic version of a style which teaches beneficial things; and as regards content, to engage in the kind of thought which is midway between that of the wise and that of the masses.¹³³

There are several uncertainties about the thrust of Philodemus' meaning here. It is hard to avoid the impression that he does not impose on himself the same requirements of conceptual definition and clarity which he insists on when framing his scathing complaints against others. For one thing, the phrase 'poetry as such' (or 'poetry qua poetry'), in the absence of compelling argument, has merely rhetorical force. Its point is (question-beggingly) to assert poetry's autonomy or self-sufficiency by implying that if poetry *were* to provide 'natural benefit', it would be in virtue of something other than its intrinsically poetic qualities.¹³⁴ Secondly, Philodemus switches from denying poetry a 'natural good' (a denial aimed specifically at Crates' beliefs¹³⁵) to denying that it provides any 'natural benefit': what exactly does he mean here by 'benefit' (to apply one of his own strictures to himself)? Why, for instance, is pleasure from poetry not a 'natural benefit'? Thirdly, the claim that 'the goals of poetic excellence' are somehow given and established, involves an

¹³³ *Poem.* 5.25.30–26.7: καὶ γὰρ καθὸ πόημα φυσικὸν οὐδὲν οὔτε λέξεως οὔτε διανοήματος ὠφέλημα παρασκευάζει. διὰ τοῦτο δὲ τῆς ἀρετῆς ἐστηκότες ὑπόκεινται σκοποῖ, τῇ μὲν λέξει τὸ μιμηθῆσθαι τὴν ὠφέλιμα προσδιδάσκουσαν, τῆς δὲ διανοίας τὸ μεταξὺ μετεσχηκέναι τῆς τῶν σοφῶν καὶ τῆς τῶν χυδαίων. For alternative translations, see Asmis 1991: 8, 1992c: 147, Armstrong 1995b: 264, Janko 2000: 131, and now Janko 2011: 225–6 (including the possibility, reading εἰ γὰρ for καὶ γάρ, that the text is a single conditional sentence containing a quotation from others).

¹³⁴ The point becomes clearer when the same phrasing recurs at *Poem.* 5.32.17–19: 'even if poems provide benefit, they do not do so qua poems' (καὶν ὠφελῇ, καθὸ πόηματ' οὐκ ὠφελεί); cf. e.g. *Mus.* 4.140.5–7 Delattre. Porter (1995: 130) interprets differently. Compare the same question-begging move in Housman 1988: 363 ('most readers, when they think that they are admiring poetry, . . . are really admiring, not the poetry . . . but something else in it, which they like better than poetry'), with 304–9 above, 325–6 below.

¹³⁵ It remains extremely uncertain, however, what Crates meant by 'the rational propositions which are present by nature' (τὰ λογικὰ θεωρήματα τὰ φύσει ὑπάρχοντα) in poetry (*Poem.* 5.38.24–5): for divergent interpretations see e.g. Asmis 1995: 152 ('the principles of good sound'), Janko 2000: 123 n. 4 (allegorically encoded truths).

Epicurean method of reasoning (from the ‘preconceptions’ or accumulated notions embodied in words) which, whatever might be its merits in other contexts, patently cannot resolve what is precisely a matter of theoretical *disagreement*: Philodemus betrays this fact with extraordinary insouciance by going on to affirm that the poetic goals in question apply ‘whether or not anyone thinks so’ (5.26.8–10)! And this is all the more so, finally, given that the goals themselves are hazily worded and far from uncontentious.

It is the first of these goals which most obviously indicates reluctance on Philodemus’ part to eliminate altogether the idea of ‘benefit’ from his terms of reference.¹³⁶ He locates the first general aim of poetry as being ‘to give a mimetic version of a style which teaches beneficial things’. Some translators prefer to render the terminology of mimesis here as ‘imitate’.¹³⁷ But if ‘imitate’ implies following a particular model closely, that can hardly be Philodemus’ point, especially since his proposition must understand ‘style’ (*lexis*) in a highly generalized sense which leaves out of account the extensive and numerous stylistic variations that exist between genres.¹³⁸ I take him, rather, to be saying that the verbal form of poetry should itself reflect poetry’s fundamentally mimetic status. Just after this, in fact, Philodemus says that ‘poetry is as mimetic a thing as it can be’ (τὸ ποίημα δ’ ἐστὶ τὸ μιμούμενον ὡς ἐνδέχεται).¹³⁹ Since Philodemus believes that ‘style’ and ‘content’ operate in a close nexus (a point to which I shall shortly return), it is appropriate for him to think of style or verbal form as itself a component of mimesis. Exactly what he meant by this one can only speculate. But it is plausible that, in effect,

¹³⁶ Asmis (1991: 9, 1992c: 148) mistakenly maintains that Philodemus advances his two goals explicitly as standards of moral ‘utility’: her case perplexingly makes him (i) call them standards of ‘goodness’, (ii) mean thereby standards of ‘utility’/‘usefulness’, but (iii) also believe that ‘the criteria of goodness may be entirely distinct from the criteria of usefulness’ (Asmis 1991: 9).

¹³⁷ True of all three translators cited in n. 133 above. I discuss Philodemus’ vocabulary of mimesis in Halliwell 2002a: 280–6; for a somewhat different account, see now Janko 2011: 232–7.

¹³⁸ Philodemus’ wording has an ostensible precedent at Arist. *Poet.* 22.1459a12, where λέξιν μιμείσθαι refers to the tendency of poetry in iambic trimeters to stay close to the register of ordinary speech. But Aristotle’s point is about stylistic similarity, not mimetic-cum-fictive status.

¹³⁹ 5.26.13–15: cf. the statement of poetry’s unlimited mimetic scope at 5.35.28–32, with Ch. 4 n. 40.

he takes all poetic *lexis* to be a matter of what might now be called fictive speech acts or fictional utterances.¹⁴⁰

Whether in narrative, dramatic, or lyric modes (since the principle, to repeat, must cover poetry in general), poetic language provides the verbal fabric, on the interpretation I am advancing, of an act of simulated or represented discourse. But why should Philodemus think it an established or given goal of poetic excellence 'to give a mimetic version of a style which *teaches beneficial things*'?¹⁴¹ Philodemus is locked into a paradox. While consistently challenging poetic theories which ascribe direct or unqualified edification to poetry, he is prepared to endorse what he presents as a culturally shared expectation that poetry should make a show of being edifying or beneficial discourse. Philodemus wants poetry to appear to have worthwhile things to communicate to its audience, yet he is unwilling to build the reality of either cognitive or ethical value into the foundations of his poetics. What this amounts to, *au fond*, is a slightly submerged, even suppressed, prevarication on the question of whether poetry has any extrinsic or instrumental value.

This uncertainty can be detected also behind the first of the two poetic 'goals' cited above, that the thought of poetry should be 'mid-way between that of the wise and that of the masses'.¹⁴² Leaving aside the demur that it is hard to see quite what basis there could be for treating such a notion as embodied in an established Greek 'preconception' of poetry (see above), the proposition is surely vulnerable to a

¹⁴⁰ This reading is supported by Philodemus' acceptance of 'resemblance to verbal composition that teaches something exceptional' (τὸ δ' ὁμοιωμένον τῇ περιττότερόν τι διδασκούσῃ) as true of all praiseworthy poetic style (*Poem.* 5.33.15–20): in endorsing that description (borrowed from others), Philodemus at the same time rejects the idea that all good poetry should *actually* 'teach' something exceptional. For other interpretations of *Poem.* 5.25.34–26.4, see Mangoni 1993: 282–4.

¹⁴¹ The prefix of the Greek verb προσδιδάσκειν used here might imply 'teach also', 'teach in addition' (i.e. in addition to fulfilling other poetic functions); cf. the versions cited in n. 133 above. But the variation between the compound and simplex verb at *Poem.* 5.33.1–17 (cf. previous note) suggests that the force of the prefix is not crucial, though it no doubt intensifies the sense: on προσδιδάσκειν at *Poem.* 1.186.11, cf. 323 with n. 152 below. The paraphrase of Innes 1989: 216, 'the style should imitate that of simple exposition', is too bland; similarly Grube 1965: 197–8.

¹⁴² Pace Asmis 1991: 10, there is no connection with Aristotle's specification for the paradigmatic tragic agent in *Poet.* 13, nor is it true that Philodemus here 'clearly distinguishes the "thought" of the poem as a whole' (he says nothing of 'the poem as a whole'), and his point cannot confidently be explained in terms of 'ordinary standards of decency'.

complaint Philodemus sometimes makes against others, namely that it is not exclusively true of poetry: why could the same not be said of e.g. rhetoric or history?¹⁴³ Indeed, must it not be true by definition of *all* discourse that is not exclusively that of either 'the wise' or 'the masses'? That objection itself reflects the more basic fact that the formulation of the goal is a desperately vague generalization, presumably driven by an attempt to avoid opposing extremes. One is entitled to suspect Philodemus here of constructing a position whose motivation is more negative than positive. He denies that poetry can or should be a medium of philosophical or other knowledge (the discourse of 'the wise'), as some Stoics in particular had asserted, or, conversely, that it could properly consist of nothing more than the unreconstructed banality of ordinary life (the language of 'the masses'). Yet he leaves the positive corollary of these denials wholly indistinct—ironically so, once again, in view of his own rebuke to others for failing to specify 'what kind' of thought is appropriate to poetry.¹⁴⁴ The nub of the matter, however, is not that Philodemus simply fails to spell out that corollary. It is, rather, that the corollary does not exist. Neither in intellectually a priori nor in culturally a posteriori terms can the 'thought' of poetry be neatly circumscribed or marked off in this way. Philodemus' airy gesture towards a putative zone of poetic thought between, so to speak, high and low registers of the mind betrays a crucial failure on his part to recognize that there are, and can be, no boundaries at all to the (potential) scope of poetic thought.¹⁴⁵

The problem this brings to light reaches down into the knotty roots of Philodemus' poetics. Nothing is more essential to the structure of his poetics than the conviction that 'style' and 'thought' ('form' and 'content'; 'language' and 'subject-matter'; 'composition' and 'theme') are not only equally important but inseparably entwined in the workings of (good) poetry.¹⁴⁶ We have already seen that this helps to

¹⁴³ For the type of objection, see esp. *Poem.* 5.7.16–20.

¹⁴⁴ *Poem.* 5.30.34–31.7, using the verb ἀποχαράττειν for 'demarcating' or 'marking off' the kind of thought; cf. 5.29.32–6.

¹⁴⁵ For a position of just that kind, see my reading of Longinus, *Subl.* in Ch. 7.

¹⁴⁶ One statement of the 'inseparability' thesis is at *Poem.* 5.15.6–13 (*lexis* made into poetry 'not without' themes; organization of action [in a dramatic/narrative poem] a property of the organization of the verbal form), where there are complications relating to Neoptolemus' own theories (cf. Asmis 1992d: 210–12). For others, see

explain how the first of the two goals stated at *Poem.* 5.25–6 can couch a principle of ‘style’ or verbal form (*lexis*) in terms which include reference to ‘content’ (‘a mimetic version of a style which teaches beneficial things’, see above). Much of Philodemus’ biting censure of others centres on his contempt for their failure to grasp this fundamental idea; he himself has been admired by modern scholars for his sophisticated refusal of a crude divorce between poetry’s linguistic form and semantic content.¹⁴⁷ But where exactly does this leave the status of poetic ‘thought’ in his system? Evidently he does not regard it as mere raw material or pre-existing subject-matter to which poetry then gives a certain kind of verbally fine expression. Such a conception of poetry, like the one espoused by Housman (‘not the thing said but a way of saying it’, 306 above), was actually held by some of the critics who come under attack from Philodemus, and it would require him to say that language, style, or composition is *more* important than thought. For Philodemus, thought must be a full partner with style in the creation of poetic meaning and value. Yet we know that he is not prepared to equate poetic meaning or value with truth or instructiveness, whether moral or domain-specific.¹⁴⁸ So just what *is* the point of poetic thought? The question becomes all the more urgent when we reckon with the fact that the equal importance of ‘form’ and ‘content’ (and perhaps even their expressive inseparability) is not itself peculiar to poetry.¹⁴⁹

If we ask where or how Philodemus identifies ‘thought’ (διάνοια, τὸ νοούμενον, etc.) in poetry, there is no easy answer. While he evidently takes thought to be an aspect of the entire fabric of a poem, he does not treat it as amounting in every case to an overall or summative

5.12.24–7 (style and subject ‘equally necessary’: i.e. neither without the other?), 5.22.13–23.21, 5.29.1–7, *PHerc.* 1081b fr. 14.17–22 (thought, διανόημα, said to be ‘disclosed through the style’, διὰ τῆς κατασκευῆς . . . ἐμφαίνεσθαι), *PHerc.* 1676 col. 6.19–24 Sbordone (composition, σύνθεσις, ‘brings with it thoughts . . .’), and cf. the sentence from *Poem.* 2 cited in n. 103 above. For the basic terms of the duality at issue, cf. n. 107 above.

¹⁴⁷ e.g. Wilkinson 1932–3: 149–51, Grube 1965: 196, 199, Innes 1989: 216 (‘his greatest claim to originality’), Greenberg 1990: 273–5. A different, more complex, assessment in Porter (1995).

¹⁴⁸ For an emphatic statement that poetry does not require (factual) truth, but can deal with even extremes of fiction (the ‘most mythic’ things, μυθωδέστατα: cf. n. 63 above), see *Poem.* 5.7.6–13.

¹⁴⁹ Their equal importance in some prose genres is affirmed at *Poem.* 5.12.12–24.

meaning.¹⁵⁰ In his critique of Neoptolemus, for example, he challenges the latter's (supposedly) clean separation of style and composition from thought and subject-matter, in the process referring to 'thoughts . . . and actions . . . and characterization' as components of the 'subject-matter' or 'thematic material' (*ὑπόθεσις*) of dramatic poetry.¹⁵¹ This shows that Philodemus treated poetic 'thought' as including the thoughts of individual characters in poetry. Indeed, it is clear enough that his category of 'thought' can approximate to a more impersonal and diffuse notion of textual 'meaning', including the meaning of narrative or dramatic texts. We see this when, in rebutting the view that words can have poetic value on account of purely sensory properties, Philodemus says that in that respect such words 'never render the thought/meaning understandable, whereas those which add intelligibility to characters(?) or passions(?) of the soul enrich what they teach us about the events'.¹⁵² As well as illustrating his tenet of the inseparability of style and content, this passage—which follows on from discussion of some lines in the *Iliad*—shows that in Philodemus the vocabulary of 'thought' can encompass the full significance of a section of poetic text, without thereby implying anything like the communication of propositional thoughts by the poet himself.

At the same time, Philodemus in a rather strong sense holds the poet 'responsible' for the thought-content, broadly construed, of his work. The poet is responsible in the first instance for carefully selecting his subject or theme, and then for what he (in Greek, literally)

¹⁵⁰ Does Philodemus *ever*, in fact, use *διάνοια* *vel sim.* in this totalizing way? Can we be sure that any Hellenistic critic did so? Asmis (1990b: 155), speaking of the Stoic criticized at Phld. *Poem.* 5.16.28–24.22, does not distinguish clearly between thought as (i) an aspect of the whole poem and (ii) as an all-inclusive meaning.

¹⁵¹ *διανοίας . . . καὶ πράξεις καὶ προσωποποιίας*, *Poem.* 5.15.4–6 (= Neoptolemus F6.20 Mette) this suggests that Neoptolemus' own terminology was close, though not identical, to Aristotle's in the *Poetics*. The same is more discretely true of the phrases *συγκεῖσθαι τὴν λέξιν* and *συγκεῖσθαι τὴν πρᾶξιν* in the same context (5.15.11–12: cf. n. 146 above): see, respectively, Arist. *Poet.* 20.1457a20, 26.1462b8.

¹⁵² *Poem.* 1.186.8–14: . . . ἀλλ' οὐχί ποτε συνετὸν ποιεῖν τὸ διανόημα, ταῦτα δὲ προσδιδάσκειν τι τῶν συμβαινόντων ἃ προσεπισυνετίζει [τὰ ἦ]θη [ἡ πάθη τ]ῆς ψυ[χῆς]. The verb *προσεπισυνετίζειν* (lit. 'add understanding to') occurs only here; the simplex *συνετίζειν* is relatively common in later (Christian) Greek and not, *contra* Janko 2000: 409 n. 8, confined to the Septuagint (see PGL 1325). On *προσδιδάσκειν* cf. n. 141 above. The use here of two verbs with prefix *προσ-* implies, as my tr. tries to indicate, a notion of thought/meaning as something that can be qualitatively enriched or 'thickened'.

‘makes’ of it: Philodemus retains an etymological sense of the poet as *poiêtês*, ‘maker’, the artisan of a verbal artefact (‘the one who makes all [his own materials]’, as he puts it in one place).¹⁵³ Strictly speaking, then, the materials of poetry can never be simply given; they are only created in the act of poetic conception-cum-composition itself, and this helps to explain why Philodemus is happy to maintain an old metaphorical tradition in referring to the creative process as one of ‘begetting’ or ‘generation’.¹⁵⁴ What’s more, we can say that ‘thought’ (or ‘thoughts’—the general interchangeability of singular and plural is telling in this regard) is not limited to exclusively cognitive content. Philodemus more than once talks of poetic thought’s capacity to ‘move’ hearers or readers, to contribute to the effect of rapture or entrancement (*psuchagôgia*) which he accepts, like many others, as the core of its psychological effect.¹⁵⁵ This combination of the cognitive and the affective reinforces the impression that ‘thought’ is a wide, flexible category for Philodemus, close to equivalent to expressive meaning in all its aspects (including narrative and thematic elements). It also underlines Philodemus’ conception of poetry as a tightly, even ‘organically’, integrated artform. But it does not, for all that, get us any closer to solving the puzzle of how Philodemus thinks he has gone beyond other critics in producing a satisfactory and stable definition of what is different or special about poetry and its value.

That puzzle remains because Philodemus is insistent that an account of poetic excellence or value calls for a definition of the kind of

¹⁵³ The poet’s responsibility for selecting his material is asserted at *Poem.* 5.10.29–31 (with preceding context); for the poet as one ‘who makes everything’ (ὁ πάντ[α] ποιῶν), see 5.15.16–17, which can be read as an echo of Aristotle’s formulation at *Poet.* 9.1451b27–32 and in turn as an implicit response to the rhetorical sarcasm of *Pl. Resp.* 10.596c–d. On Aristotle, cf. Ch. 5, 233.

¹⁵⁴ *PHerc.* 1676 col. 6.26 Sbordone, with the verb *γεννᾶν*, cf. *PHerc.* 1081b col. 7.5. The same term is used of generating (non-)philosophical thoughts at *Pl. Resp.* 6.496a, and (in a marked image of sexual degeneracy) of poetry’s production of base offspring, *Resp.* 10.603b. For older metaphors of poetic creation as natural fertility, see Taillardat 1965: 446. Longinus, *Subl.* uses *γεννᾶν* for the ‘echo’ of creativity in the reader’s mind: Ch. 7 n. 29. Cf. Ch. 5 n. 2 for natural creativity as a dimension of the entire history of poetry.

¹⁵⁵ The moving/psychagogic effect of ‘thought(s)’ is registered at *PHerc.* 1676 col. 6.23–4 Sbordone, *PHerc.* 1081b fr. 23.3–9 (Tr. C fr. n Sbordone), *Poem.* 5.36.29–32. The tr. of *ψυχαγωγῶσιν* in the first of those passages as ‘command our attention’, Armstrong 1995a: 220, is inadequate; cf. n. 157 below. On *ψυχαγωγία* in Philodemus (and earlier), see Wigodsky 1995: 65–8 (too ready, like many, to flatten the Hellenistic sense to ‘entertain’), Chandler 2006: 147–67. Cf. Ch. 5, 223–6.

thought peculiar to poetry, yet he is unable to offer anything like a clinching definition himself. Having vigorously discarded theories of poetry which tie its value explicitly to extrinsic criteria of 'benefit', as well as those which reduce that value (absurdly) to a matter of purely sensory properties of sound,¹⁵⁶ Philodemus is left stranded in a chimerical quest for a statement of what makes poetry different from all other forms of discourse. Philodemus may well deserve to be applauded, as a sort of New Critic *avant la lettre*, for the astuteness of his sense that 'form' and 'content' cannot be treated as wholly separate entities or independent variables.¹⁵⁷ But just as New Criticism, for all its power of close focus on intricacies of poetic language conceived as an 'organic' unity of form and content, could never make good its boldest claims for the autonomy of the poem as 'verbal object' (how could any poem, as a structure of meaning, ever be sealed off from the larger workings of language and experience?), so Philodemus is unable to secure his case for the self-sufficiency of poetic value. I tried to show earlier that Philodemus himself has some awareness of his predicament, an awareness which betrays itself in the delicate equivocations over whether there might after all be said to be a certain kind of 'benefit' in the experience of poetry.

If we return briefly, in conclusion, to the comparison I broached between Philodemus and Housman, we are now well placed to see a curious mixture of similarity and difference in the relationship between them. Both of them, as critics, would like to be able to define an autonomous, psychagogic value—grounded in a powerfully self-contained mode of experience—for poetry. In Housman's case, the attempt involves an impetus (imperfectly sustained) towards decoupling feeling and emotion from 'thought', with the consequence, I suggested, of incoherence in the development of the argument:

¹⁵⁶ On the absurdity and fallaciousness of extreme euphonism as a theoretical position see the trenchant remarks of Richards 1929: 231–3. Porter (2004) provides one perspective on the origins of Greek euphonism; see now Porter (2010: Ch. 6).

¹⁵⁷ Armstrong (1995a: 219) briefly compares Philodemus to New Criticism, only to open a gap between them by insisting that the former's poetics are 'wholly intellectualist'. But Armstrong ignores the place of both emotion and *psuchagôgia* in Philodemus (cf. n. 155 above), as well as making the debatable assumption that New Criticism is not itself markedly intellectualist. For a robust defence of New Criticism which downplays the tendency to claim aesthetic autonomy for poetry, see Wellek 1982: 87–103; a more nuanced reappraisal in Graff 1979: 129–49. Fantuzzi and Hunter (2004: 449–61) align Philodemus with an Alexandrian aesthetic of compositional finesse and novelty.

Housman's poetics is that of an intuitionist and emotionalist whose test of value can even allow poetry, as we saw, to collapse into 'nonsense'. Philodemus, on the other hand, tries to hold together thought and language in a tightly unified bond of expressiveness. But he makes difficulties for himself precisely by insisting on the poetic importance of thought and meaning, and their production by language ('a matter of linguistic expressions which signify thought by being composed in a certain way'),¹⁵⁸ yet baulking at any attempt to allow extrinsic, i.e. non-autonomous, criteria of value some purchase on the experience of poetry. The point of weakness in Philodemus' poetics is a result, paradoxically, of his desire to do justice to the cognitive and emotional richness of poetic expression: such richness, he seems to believe, cannot be characterized in a way that would allow any dilution in the purity of poetry's identity. Both Housman and Philodemus, then, while approaching the subject from radically different angles, want to safeguard poetic autonomy. But the desires of both founder on the impossibility of establishing a conception of value which belongs to poetry and to poetry alone.

¹⁵⁸ See n. 103 above.

The Mind's Infinity: Longinus and the Psychology of the Sublime

ψυχῆς πείρατα ἴων οὐκ ἐξεύροιο . . .

No journey could lead you to discover the limits of soul . . .

(Heraclitus)

Great thoughts have no frontiers.

(Tolstoy)¹

THUNDERBOLTS AND ECHOES: THE ECSTASY OF THE SUBLIME

The ancient treatise *On the Sublime*, about whose author and date I remain for present purposes agnostic, is the only major document in the history of Western literary criticism and theory whose frame of reference extends all the way from sensitivity to the individual words, even individual syllables, of texts to a sense of the infinite spaces that lie (in thought) 'outside the cosmos'.² The intellectual self-confidence

¹ Heraclitus B45 DK; Tolstoy (with continuation, 'but writers long ago reached the impassable frontier of their expression'), diary entry for 29 Mar 1852, in Christian 1985: i. 48.

² For the notion of a perspective outside or beyond the cosmos, see *Subl.* 35.3 with 343–4 below; for an example of a single syllable making a difference to sublimity, see 39.4. On the treatise's authorship and date, Russell (1964: pp. xxii–xxx) remains as good a *mise au point* of this vexed issue as any; cf. Mazzucchi 1992: pp. xxvii–xxxiv, Lombardo 2007: 121–4, Matelli 2007: 118 n. 46. Heath (1999) offers an interesting but inconclusive revival of the case for Cassius Longinus' authorship; objections in

which allows Longinus to hold together these seemingly incommensurable objects and planes of reflection no doubt stems from more than one source. But it derives at least in part from a kind of marriage of the traditions of Greek rhetoric, whose interests focused on the persuasive properties of language even at the 'micro' level of particular words and sounds, with the mentality of Greek philosophy, which characteristically aspired to 'the contemplation of all time and all being' (in a famous phrase from Plato's *Republic* which was certainly familiar to Longinus).³ One can say, with equal validity, that Longinus works with many of the standard concepts and 'tools' of rhetorical analysis but stretches and breaches the limits of such analysis for the sake of a more comprehensive perspective on human experience, or, alternatively, that he converts even the most ambitious philosophical values into a form which allows them to be traced and inspected within the linguistic fabric of great 'creative' writing (the adjective has a special Longinian justification, as will emerge) in both poetry and prose.⁴

This combination of potentially disparate modes of thought—a concern for quasi-material specificities of language and a grand sweep of vision orientated towards the whole of reality—gives Longinus' treatise a quality of mind which goes far towards accounting for its seminal influence on early modern, and in some ways proto-Romantic, attitudes to sublimity in literature (and beyond). By the same token, this cast of mind might be thought to make the work look alien to the markedly sceptical and relativizing tendencies of a great deal of more recent thinking in literary theory and aesthetics. Yet in fact neither Longinus nor, more generally, the category of the sublime has ceased to exercise fascination for contemporary critics

Köhnken 2006: 569–70 n. 1. Various aspects of the work's broader cultural mentality, looking back to a 'canonical' past from a position within the world of imperial Graeco-Roman literature, are discussed in Porter 2001: esp. 76–85, Whitmarsh 2001: 57–71, Too 1998: 207–16.

³ *θεωρία παντὸς μὲν χρόνου, πάσης δὲ οὐσίας*, Pl. *Resp.* 6.486a: for a Longinian echo of this passage, see n. 36 below.

⁴ Cross-fertilization and/or 'boundary disputes' between rhetoric and philosophy were not, of course, unprecedented before Longinus; they go back to the early development of both modes of thought: Gorgias and Plato are crucial figures. But Longinus develops a nonetheless highly distinctive voice in this regard. On his relationship to Gorgias, see n. 21 below.

and theorists.⁵ I will not be engaging in detail here with the numerous reinterpretations of sublimity currently being pursued in both theory and practice, though I will draw attention to an often overlooked but fundamental difference between *ὑψος* (*hupsos*) and many members of the modern family of ideas whose growth was stimulated by renewed interest in Longinus from the late seventeenth century onwards. While keeping this historical vista in mind, the argument of the present chapter will concentrate on elucidating some remarkable features of the Longinian project in a way which tries to coordinate them with the problems of poetic value discussed in my previous chapters. This approach is warranted not only by the fact that poetry has a high profile in Longinus' terms of reference (sublimity is the sole explanation of the primacy of the greatest poets as well as prose-writers), but also because in a certain sense—and in this respect not unlike Gorgias, an author, however, whom he does not seem to have admired—he assimilates all the texts he deals with, whatever their generic or pragmatic status, to the condition of poetry.⁶ I hope that my analysis will also help to show more broadly why the treatise's critical stance remains challenging and instructive both for those who believe in some version of the sublime and for those who do not.

If there is a kind of potent mixture of rhetoric and philosophy in *On the Sublime*, its productive tensions are of a subtlety which can be interpreted from more than one point of view. 'Persuasion' itself, for instance, the defining concept of rhetorical theory, would provide one route of approach to the work's strategies of argument. The sublime,

⁵ For some recent conceptions of the sublime in both theory and practice, see e.g. Saint Girons (2005: ch. 8), Hoffmann (2006), Shaw (2006), Most (2007). For Longinus' presence in the thought of Harold Bloom, cf. n. 79 below. Doran (forthcoming) provides a new long-range account of the influence and transformation of Longinus' ideas.

⁶ On Longinus' relation to Gorgias, cf. n. 4 above, nn. 11, 21 below. For the treatise's transgeneric conception of sublime discourse (*logos*), see esp. *Subl.* 1.3: the supreme excellence of discourse which constitutes sublimity is the exclusive source of the pre-eminence of the greatest poets and prosewriters, . . . ὡς ἀκρότης καὶ ἐξοχή τις λόγων ἐστὶ τὰ ὕψη, καὶ ποιητῶν τε οἱ μέγιστοι καὶ συγγραφέων οὐκ ἄλλοθεν ἢ ἐνθάδε ποθὲν ἐπρώτευσαν. (All citations from the treatise, unless otherwise indicated, follow the text of Russell 1968; Mazzucchi 1992 should always be consulted: note that the numbering of chapter subdivisions sometimes differs between these edns. A 2nd edn of Mazzucchi is expected.) Longinus also couples great poets and prose-writers (or vice versa) as a single corpus of sublime writing at 9.15, 13.2, 40.2 (by implication); even when he tries to distinguish 'poetic' from 'rhetorical' imagination (*phantasia*) in ch. 15, it is significant that his argument becomes unstable (see 347–50 below).

we are led to believe, surpasses persuasion. True grandeur, Longinus tells us programmatically, 'induces not persuasion but ecstasy in its hearers', a claim he elaborates by explaining that what arouses awe or wonder, accompanied by a 'stunning' impact (*ekplêxis*) of feeling, always holds a stronger grip on the mind than what is merely persuasive or pleasurable.⁷ But this pronouncement is not unproblematic. Elsewhere in the treatise, 'persuasion' does sometimes seem to play an active role in the sublime, as though certain cases of the latter do not so much dispense with persuasiveness as absorb it into a larger, more powerful psychological effect of conviction.⁸ I shall touch on this point again at a later stage.

My main emphasis here, however, will not be on the variable relationship between sublimity and persuasiveness in the work's scheme of values but on what I see as an elusive yet highly significant dialectic between the ideas of 'ecstasy' and 'truth'. Direct equivalents of both these terms, in fact, make prominent appearances in Longinus' critical vocabulary (one of them in the sentence quoted above), though I should stress at once that my argument will not be limited to these lexical items as such, which do not stand as discrete elements in Longinus' rich texture of writing. I shall use the ideas of 'ecstasy' and 'truth' to help chart a wider field of play in the conception of what is involved in the experience of *hupsos*, whether on the part of the writer or on that of the reader/hearer. 'Ecstasy', accordingly, will serve as a

⁷ οὐ γὰρ εἰς πειθὼ τοὺς ἀκρωμένους ἀλλ' εἰς ἔκστασιν ἄγει τὰ ὑπερφυᾶ· πάντῃ δέ γε σὺν ἐκπλήξει τοῦ πιθανοῦ καὶ τοῦ πρὸς χάριν αἰεὶ κρατεῖ τὸ θαυμάσιον . . . , *Subl.* 1.4; on the precise interpretation of the second half of the sentence see Russell 1964: 62, noting that here (and at 35.4–5) Longinus comes close to identifying *ekplêxis* with one kind of wonder (cf. Ch. 5 n. 48 for Aristotle's definition of the former as an extreme of the latter). Cf. n. 11 below. Interestingly akin to *Subl.* 1.4 is the statement of Anon. *Seg. Rhet.* 94, '(arousing) emotion not only persuades but also transports into ecstasy' (τὸ δὲ πάθος οὐ μόνον πείθει ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐξίστησι). Note that at *Subl.* 38.5 *ekstasis* is a property of actions or emotions 'in' a text, not (immediately) in the hearer/reader: but the communicative character of the Longinian sublime (333–40 below) nonetheless transmits such ecstasy to the audience. For one modern version of sublime 'ecstasy', cf. Santayana 1936: 186; add now the invocation of Longinus by a major film director, in support of his own conception of 'ecstatic truth', in Herzog 2010: 8–12.

⁸ Some examples: at 16.2 Demosthenes' Marathon oath (364–6 below) combines 'sublimity, emotion . . . and persuasive strength' (*ὑψος καὶ πάθος καί . . . ἀξιοπιστίαν*); at 18.1 Demosthenes' question-and-answer technique makes his language 'not only more sublime . . . but also more persuasive' (οὐ μόνον ὑψηλότερον . . . ἀλλὰ καὶ πιστότερον); at 38.3 extreme *pathos* in itself makes a Thucydidean narrative more persuasive (*πιστόν*). For the tension between sublime *ekplêxis* and persuasiveness in Ch. 15, see 348–9 below.

sort of shorthand for the intensely transformative moments of consciousness which Longinus takes to be a hallmark of the sublime, and which he famously compares to the sudden impact of a thunderbolt (1.4), while 'truth' represents the enlarged comprehension of reality which he seems equally to regard as a dimension of what the mind experiences (or can discover) in its encounters with sublimity.

At first sight, we might appear to be faced here with a contrast between modes of subjectivity and objectivity. Ecstasy seems ineliminably to make reference to what the sublime feels like or does to its recipient 'on the inside', whereas truth seems to depend on, and to claim contact with, an external (even cosmic) scheme of things apprehended as undeniably 'out there'. Translating Longinus' own thunderbolt simile back into literal terms, one might be tempted to compare the difference to that between a sensation of awed amazement at the violent power of the celestial phenomenon and an expanded vision of the world as brilliantly revealed or illuminated by the lightning's flashes. Yet this same image hardly invites an analytic separation between two aspects of consciousness; it presents them as powerfully fused in a single experience.⁹ But does that mean that ecstasy outweighs truth in the Longinian perspective? A thunderbolt, after all, is impressive for nothing if not its instantaneous immediacy, its transfiguration of the viewer's whole awareness in the here and now. On the other hand, why should that overpowering impression not trigger and leave behind something more lasting in the memory, something for the mind to contemplate at greater length and on repeated occasions (a quality of the sublime to which, as I stress below, Longinus draws attention in chapter 7)? If ecstasy, as the first chapter of the treatise asserts, lies somehow 'beyond persuasion', must that make it an irrational, non-cognitive state of mind, an intense but brief alteration of consciousness which contains its own thrilling gratification and requires nothing further to complete it?

⁹ 1.4 does indeed mention, within the simile's overlapping reference to sublimity/thunderbolt, the twin aspects of 'tearing apart' everything (cf. n. 17 below) and 'revealing' or 'displaying' (ἐνδείκνυσθαι) a concentrated power; but it would be strained to suppose that these are to be separately correlated with ecstatic and veridical implications of *hypsos*. Longinus returns to the thunderbolt or lightning image at 12.4 and 34.4 (re Demosthenes, where the verb καταβροντᾶν, 'deafen with thunder', is also used). Note that unlike some other thunderbolt metaphors in ancient criticism (cf. Ch. 3, 116, with n. 40 there), Longinus' trope does not presuppose a particular stylistic register: its point is a matter of concentrated psychological impact.

Or might ecstasy itself be a form of deep cognition? Can the moment of sublime rapture somehow contain and transmit truth, and if so what kind of truth would that be? These are some of the important and difficult questions to which I shall propose tentative answers in this chapter.

Whenever exactly he was writing (somewhere between the first and third centuries AD), Longinus knew himself to be a relatively late figure in a tradition of Greek literary and rhetorical criticism which had long possessed a rich archive of metaphors—drawn from magic, bewitchment, drugs, and experience of religious or mystical ‘possession’¹⁰—to describe the intense transformations of mind which special uses of language could bring about. Longinus himself makes use of several metaphors of this type to characterize the phenomenology of the sublime at its most concentrated. Among these, as the sentence quoted earlier from *Subl.* 1.4 illustrates, is the vocabulary of *ekstasis* (‘ecstasy’, literally a state in which the mind ‘stands outside’ itself, a loss or forgetting of one’s ‘normal’ self) and the closely related term *ekplêxis*, which denotes a ‘stunning’ impact on the mind that is compatible with various emotions, including tragic pity and fear.¹¹ While both those terms have their roots in a much older critical lexicon, it is worth noting that *ekstasis* and its cognates, though found in Plato (a fact whose resonance may have appealed to Longinus), are relatively rarely applied to the mental impact of language in the rhetorical tradition: they are not to be found at all, for instance, in either Demetrius, *De elocutione* or in the writings of Dionysius of Halicarnassus.¹² This may be in part because the terminology of

¹⁰ See Ch. 2, 47–53, Ch. 4 nn. 89–91, Ch. 5, 223–6, Ch. 6, 273–4, for various items in this cluster of metaphors.

¹¹ On earlier conceptions of *ekplêxis*, see Ch. 3 n. 60 (Gorgias/Aristophanes), Ch. 5, 229–31 (Aristotle and tragedy). Unlike Demetr. *Eloc.* 283, Longinus does not tie *ekplêxis* intrinsically to fear: although fear is relevant at *Subl.* 22.4, a wider spectrum of possibilities is indicated at 1.4, 12.5, 15.2 (*ekplêxis* as the general aim of poetic imagination), 15.11, and 35.4. Cf. Dion. Hal. *Pomp.* 1 (751), ἐκπλήττεσθαι as appreciative amazement at Plato’s stylistic flair. For other examples of usage, see Pfister 1939: 184, 1959: 958. Cf. nn. 7–8 above.

¹² The only use of ἐκστασις in Dionysius (*Comp.* 15) refers to the charioteers’ fear at Hom. *Il.* 18.225; it is equivalent to ἐκπλήσσειν (cf. previous note) in the Homeric text. Among rare occurrences of the verb ἐξίστημι in Dionysius (e.g. *Ant. Rom.* 3.21.5), none concerns rhetorical or literary effects. Even in Plato, at *Menex.* 235a–b (combined with the vocabulary of magic and bewitchment: cf. the references in n. 10 above), Socrates’ application of ἐξεστηκέναι (‘to be enraptured’) to his experience of epideictic rhetoric is shaded with hyperbolic irony, though it must reflect a current

ekstasis was imprinted with strong associations of uncontrollable irrationality, including states of mind induced by madness, erotic passion, terror, and uncontrollable anger. But does that mean, then, that Longinus himself *was* happy to associate the sublime with irrationality?

At first glance, chapter 1 might seem to justify an affirmative answer to that question. As we have seen, Longinus here prominently and programmatically combines the two terms *ekstasis* and *ekplêxis* in a way which aligns if not identifies them with sublimity's 'mastery and irresistible force' (δυναστείαν καὶ βίαν ἄμαχον) over the mind, connects them with feelings of wonder or astonishment, and contrasts them with what is (only) 'persuasive', the latter an effect which he says for the most part is 'within our control' (ἐφ' ἡμῶν), i.e. presumably, subject to rational appraisal. The conditions of sublime ecstasy, it might appear, are so overwhelming as to leave the mind no control over its own response: must that not amount to a kind of irrationality? In chapter 3, however, Longinus registers an important caveat. In criticizing writers who become 'as it were intoxicated' (ὥσπερ ἐκ μέθης) with an emotion that overflows the needs of the context, he describes them as indulging in ecstatic raptures before an audience that is not itself enraptured.¹³ What we gather here is that there can be a feverishly emotional form of subjectivity—a sort of private ecstasy, we could say—which falls very far short of constituting an authentic state of the sublime. The latter calls instead for a powerful *intersubjectivity*, a transmission of heightened consciousness between different minds via the penetrating language of a speech or text. So to recognize the operations of sublimity, we need to be able to attest to something more than our own rapture: we need to be receptive to and aware of an act of communication in which one mind's conception of something great can be felt to 'echo' (to adapt

critical idiom (and NB 235c for implied loss of self in *ekstasis*). Cf. Mazzucchi 1992: 235. For the history of *ekstasis* and related terminology, see the useful surveys of Pfister (1939, 1959).

¹³ ἐξεστηκότες πρὸς οὐκ ἐξεστηκότας, 3.5. Cf. the description of those who 'seem to themselves [or take themselves] to be in an inspired/possessed state (ἐνθουσιᾶν)' at 3.2, a formulation which shows that 'sincerity' of belief is not sufficient for the sublime: authenticity (i.e. thought and feeling of the appropriate kind) is needed too.

one of Longinus' own most telling tropes) in the minds of others exposed to it.¹⁴

However paradoxical it may seem, intersubjectivity—the capacity of the sublime to connect minds—remains an indispensable premise of Longinus' case. This is true even when, exhibiting his partiality for strikingly bold figures of speech, he goes so far as to describe the workings of sublimity as a type of psychological compulsion, force, or even violence. He uses the noun *βία* for this purpose not only at 1.4, quoted above, but also in a kindred passage of chapter 12 where he visualizes Demosthenes' fierce grandeur as a scorching, destructive fire that can 'burn and devastate everything' (*καίειν τε ἅμα καὶ διαρπάζειν*, 12.4);¹⁵ this is the same passage where Longinus resorts again to his thunderbolt metaphor and describes the effects of the orator's emotional vehemence on his hearers in terms of *ekplêxis* (*ἐκπλήττειν*, 12.5). Demosthenes is once more the subject, and the vocabulary of *ekplêxis* correspondingly recurs, in a section of chapter 22 where, adducing the use of dislocated syntax (hyperbaton), Longinus manages to make the experience of a particular kind of Demosthenic sentence sound something a little like clambering hazardously, even vertiginously, over precipitous crags. He speaks of the orator 'dragging' or 'pulling' his audience along with him (*συνεπισπώμενος*) on the journey, filling them with 'fear' that the sentence might collapse, 'compelling' them (*συναναγκάσας*) to 'share in the danger' with the speaker, and eventually being 'stunned' (another instance of *ekplêxis*) by the way he finally delivers them to their destination (22.3–4).¹⁶ We see here an extravagant virtuosity of language on Longinus' own part in the manner in which he casts the

¹⁴ See 9.2, 'sublimity is an echo of greatness of mind', *ὕψος μεγαλοφροσύνης ἀπήχημα*. Cf. 356–9 below.

¹⁵ Cf. 33.5: Pindar and Sophocles sometimes 'set fire to everything with their momentum', *πάντα ἐπιφλέγουσι τῇ φορᾷ*, where the image is implicitly that of fire fanned by wind. Commentators fail to notice that the verb *ἐπιφλέγειν* may here (subconsciously?) echo Pindar's own use at *Ol.* 9.22, '[I the poet] setting the city alight with blazing songs', *πόλιν/μαλεραῖς ἐπιφλέγων αἰοδαῖς*.

¹⁶ Is it coincidence, or was it somehow at the back of Longinus' mind, that Demosthenes himself uses the relatively rare verb *συνεπισπᾶσθαι* just once (19.224: note the association with fear)? My suggestion of overtones of travelling over hazardous high ground at *Subl.* 22.3–4 may owe something to the characterization of Demosthenic sublimity as *ἀπότομος*, i.e. 'sheer' like a cliff face, at 12.4 (cf. 39.4). On the 'dangers' and perils of sublimity, cf. von Staden 2000: 371–2; for earlier metaphors of literary risk or danger, cf. *Ar. Frogs* 99 (Euripides' daring phrasing, *τι παρακεκινδυνευμένον*), with Ch. 3, 103–4, and Hunter 2009: 29–32; also Demetr.

experience of individual sentences into such vibrantly elaborate terms; but there is also a characteristic clustering of metaphors of a kind which conjures up associations while eluding reduction to a single, definite image. One might also be left wondering, on the basis of 1.4 and 12.4, what exactly it is that the sublime could be thought capable of *destroying* or 'devastating'.¹⁷ The answer to that question requires us, I think, to recognize a compression of thought in Longinus' formulations. Sublimity does not as such destroy anything; what is predicated of it is a thrillingly charged energy analogous to great natural forces (thunderbolts, fire, and the like) whose destructive potential can itself be a source of excitement and awe in observers sufficiently removed from immediate peril. That is a point to bear in mind as regards the 'fearsomeness' of the sublime, a subject to which I shall return. But my immediate concern is to emphasize that passages like those just quoted leave no doubt that Longinus claims for the ecstasy of the sublime a sort of psychological compulsion, an involuntary submission.

What bearing does this have on the (ir)rationality of the sublime or on its relationship to the contrast of value between ecstasy and truth? Psychological 'compulsion' is compatible, I suggest, with either of two radically different paradigms of how the sublime might affect the minds of those who experience it: one involves an external mind-changing agency (a psychotropic force analogous to that of a drug, magic spell, or divine possession), the other a process which springs from within the mind's own internal structures and properties, including its cognitive capacities. These paradigms are both present in the vocabulary and motifs which underpin older Greek conceptions of poetic and rhetorical influence over the consciousness of audiences. But as earlier chapters of this book have shown in various ways, the distinction between the two paradigms is easily blurred in practice, partly for reasons of semantics (it is often hard to distinguish between literal, metaphorical, and semi-metaphorical meanings of key terms), and partly for psychological reasons: a psychotropic agency can only be effective if it can lock onto functioning components of the mind or soul; and the mind's own dynamics manifest

Eloc. 80, 85, 98 etc. (less admiring of risk-taking than Longinus), with Roberts 1902: 287–8, s.v. *κινδυνώδης*.

¹⁷ Compare the verbs *διαφορεῖν*, 'tear to pieces' (1.4), and *διαρπάζειν*, 'devastate' or 'ravage' (12.4), prompted in each case by the thunderbolt simile.

themselves above all in the ways in which they respond to the external 'stimuli' (the images, narratives, ideas, and emotions) contained in poetic or rhetorical language. Given Longinus' inheritance, adaptation, and ongoing revaluation of much of the currency of earlier Greek rhetorico-poetic criticism (a tradition he himself condenses into the collective activity of 'the judgement of discourse', ἡ τῶν λόγων κρίσις, 6.1¹⁸), we should not be entirely surprised to find a degree of complexity and instability in his interpretation of the impact of *hupsos* on the mind. There is no doubt that in places the treatise displays ostensible allegiance to a psychotropic model of that impact: this is the case with the imagery, already considered, of the 'coercive' power of the thunderbolt or raging fire, and there are other elements of his vocabulary which seem to point in this same direction.¹⁹ But despite a certain penchant for couching the effects of sublimity in terms of an irresistible force which imposes itself on the mind from outside (even to the point, oxymoronically, of 'enslaving' it, 15.9),²⁰ I want to argue that Longinus is a long way from espousing a full-blown psychotropic model of the kind found in, say, Gorgias' account of the 'magic' of language.²¹ In particular, my contention is that he should not be read as adopting a non- or anti-cognitivist construal of the mind's responsiveness to sublimity. On

¹⁸ Cf. 'judgement of poems', κρίσις ποιημάτων, at Dion. Thrax, *Gramm.* 1.1.6; even if the significance of that is debatable (see Schenkeveld 1993: 264 n. 2), Philodemus uses similar phrases for poetic criticism at e.g. *Poem.* 1.27.18–19, 130.6–7, 5.29.9–10. On Greek usage of the vocabulary of critical 'judgement', see further in Ch. 3 n. 10, Ch. 6 n. 106.

¹⁹ See e.g. (κατα)κηλεῖν, 'cast a spell on', at 30.1, 39.3; cf. Ch. 2 n. 19, Ch. 4, 196–7 for Homeric and Platonic precedents. Cf. the language of 'drugs' or 'antidotes' noted at 365 below.

²⁰ The idea of the sublime 'enslaving' (δουλοῦν) the mind is an oxymoron in the sense that for Longinus anything associated with servile states of mind contradicts sublimity: see 9.3, and cf. 44.4 (Longinus' philosopher friend), 44.9.

²¹ Carchia (1990: 105–9) discerns a strong affinity between the views of Longinus and Gorgias. While I agree that the Longinian sublime is not a 'secularized' concept and that it has a vitally Platonic component (ibid. 107–13), I cannot accept the Gorgianic dimension he finds in the treatise. *Subl.* 3.2 (part of the larger critique of pseudo-ecstasy: see 333–4 above), which endorses disparagement of the rhetorician's bombastic tendencies, indicates that Longinus could not have considered Gorgias an exemplary predecessor. Porter (1993: 267–8) draws attention to similarities of vocabulary between Longinus and Gorgias, but he erases two crucial differences: Longinus, unlike Gorgias, sees no tension between 'ecstasy' and truth, but he does, again unlike Gorgias, draw a distinction between ecstasy and 'persuasion'; see 329–30 above, 337–9 below.

the contrary, the cumulative thrust of his treatment of language leads decisively to a cognitivist model of the sublime, a model in which thought and emotion—both focusing themselves on what Longinus takes to be permanent features of reality (and making contact, therefore, with a kind of ‘truth’)—work in close harness. The ‘compulsion’ of sublimity is an experience which the mind itself enthusiastically seeks and embraces.

One passage which lends support to this thesis is the interwoven comparison-and-contrast which chapter 39 develops between musical and verbal expression (39.1–3). The passage forms a prelude to Longinus’ discussion of ‘composition’ (σύνθεσις) or word-arrangement as one of the five most fertile sources of the sublime. Like other rhetoricians, including Dionysius of Halicarnassus, he takes this aspect of discourse to have a quasi-musical status: i.e. to be a kind of *harmonia*, a term which here means something more like ‘melodic line’ and ‘rhythmic phrasing’ than ‘harmony’ in the modern musical sense, despite the frequent preference of translators for the latter.²² This prompts Longinus to refer to instrumental music itself as an analogue to verbal composition. He starts by appearing to concede to instrumental music a power which incorporates the possibility of the sublime itself. *Harmonia*, he says, ‘is by nature a wonderful instrument not only of persuasion and pleasure but also of grandiloquence (?) and emotion’,²³ a formulation which, notwithstanding uncertainty about the transmitted text, reminds us of the general characterization of the sublime provided in Chapter 1 (330 above), though the difference between ‘not persuasion but ecstasy’ (1.4.) and ‘not only persuasion . . .’ should be noted. Longinus reinforces the musical analogy by citing (conceivably from his reading of Plato rather than from firsthand experience) the acutely emotional aulos music associated with Corybantic rituals, music which renders its hearers ‘out of their mind, as it were, and full of Corybantic frenzy’ (οἶον ἑκφρονας καὶ

²² The term *harmonia* is used with reference to something more like ‘vertical’ harmony in a different Longinian analogy with music, at 28.1–2; cf. Russell 1964: 147–8, West 1992: 206. The same is true of the term *sumphōnia* in the reference to lyre music at 39.2.

²³ οὐ μόνον ἐστὶ πειθοῦς καὶ ἡδονῆς ἢ ἁρμονία φυσικὸν ἀνθρώποις, ἀλλὰ καὶ μεγαληγορίας καὶ πάθους θαυμαστόν τι ὄργανον (39.1). Russell (1968: 47) and Mazzucchi (1992: 104) both print Toll’s emendation *μεγαληγορίας* (for the corrupt reading *μετ’ ἐλευθερίας*, ‘with freedom’), though this remains far from certain.

κορυβαντισμοῦ πλήρεις) as well as exercising a rhythmic 'compulsion' (ἀναγκάζειν) over them.²⁴

At first sight, this emphatic if by now conventional point of reference seems to set up a nexus of thought between one kind of ecstatic music and the verbally induced ecstasy of the sublime. But Longinus has scarcely started to propose the comparison when he shows signs of modifying it—an impression of ambivalence only augmented by the extraordinary intricacy of the massive single sentence (179 words long!) in which he allows the analogy to unfold and then turn back on itself.²⁵ While adducing the music of the lyre alongside that of the aulos, he describes the sounds of the former as 'wholly meaningless' (οὐδὲν ἀπλῶς σημαίνοντες), admitting that they can produce 'a wonderful bewitchment' (θαυμαστόν... θέλγητρον) yet concluding that they are 'simulacra and illegitimate surrogates of persuasion' (εἶδωλα καὶ μιμήματα νόθα... πιθοῦς, 39.3). The *harmonia* of verbal composition, on the other hand, uses language to 'touch the very soul, not [sc. unlike music] the hearing alone'; it arouses 'diverse notions of words, thoughts, things, beauty and mellifluousness' (ποικίλας κινούσαν ἰδέας ὀνομάτων νοήσεων πραγμάτων κάλλους εὐμελείας); it draws the audience into sharing the emotions of the speaker; it builds greatness into the mounting edifice of words (τῇ τε τῶν λέξεων ἐποικοδομήσει τὰ μεγέθη συναρμόζουσιν); and in all these respects it entrances us (κηλεῖν), raises us to the level of the sublime, and in every way 'takes control over our thought processes' or our 'powers of reflection' (παντοίως ἡμῶν τῆς διανοίας ἐπικρατοῦσαν).²⁶

²⁴ 39.2. Compare the Corybantic analogy in Socrates' account of poetic inspiration at Pl. *Ion* 533e–534a, 536c; cf. Murray 1996: 115 for further references.

²⁵ On the construction of the sentence (which turns into a question), with a tr. into eight English sentences, see Russell 1964: 173; cf. Matelli 1987: 176–7.

²⁶ In the remainder of this chapter (39.4), Longinus proceeds to analyse the *harmonia* of a Demosthenic sentence in a way which ascribes expressive importance to rhythm in its own right (even if the technical details remain perplexing; Russell 1964: 175, Mazzucchi 1992: 275–6); note his claim that 'the eloquence is produced by the rhythmic phrasing just as much as by the thought', αὐτῆς τῆς διανοίας οὐκ ἔλαττον τῇ ἁρμονίᾳ πεφώνηται (mistranslated in Donadi 2005: 369), together with the observation that, with a certain change of sentence rhythm, 'it means the same but no longer has the same impact', τὸ αὐτὸ σημαίνει, οὐ τὸ αὐτὸ δὲ ἔτι προσπίπτει. This helps to show why Longinus was drawn to the analogy with music in the first place, and confirms some ambiguity in his stance, though it remains clear enough that he perceives verbal rhythm as essentially operating in interplay with semantic content: cf. ἡ ἁρμονία τῷ ὕψει συνηχεῖ, 'the rhythmic phrasing resonates with the sublimity'.

There are several angles from which the complex sequence of ideas contained in this passage might be analysed. My own concern is to emphasize that if Longinus really subscribed to a model of sublime ecstasy as caused by a purely external psychotropic agency, he would have no reason not to attribute to music the same sublime power as he ascribes to verbal artefacts. The reason why he does not do so emerges from the intricate dialectic of the sentence paraphrased in the previous paragraph. It is clear that Longinus does recognize a kind of emotional power in at any rate some types of music (perhaps partly in deference to the interests of his addressee, Postumius Terentianus, judging by the direct reference to the latter at 39.3). He even makes an initial, if ambiguous, gesture towards seeing in music's capacity to induce heightened ('Corybantic') states of mind a kind of resemblance to the sublime. He pulls back from this, however, on the fundamental grounds that he can discern no *cognitive content* in music, no capacity to arouse 'notions of words, thoughts, things'. This must be at least part of what he means by calling musical sounds 'simulacra and illegitimate surrogates of persuasion': that is, if one felt 'persuaded' by a piece of music one would be unable to say *what* it had persuaded one (to believe). But this has important implications for musical 'emotion', *pathos*, as well. It leaves it without any determinate content, only with (so Longinus seems to suppose) a vague sense of mood or atmosphere.²⁷

By contrast, the expression of *pathos* through the verbal composition of great writing is characterized in a series of clauses which between them suggest two features of sublimity that Longinus denies to music (and to both of which I shall return): first, that it brings elements of thought and emotion into a significant relationship with one another; secondly, that it entails a genuine communication from one mind to another (a communication called emotional 'participation', *μετουσία*, at 39.3). Both these points are relevant to interpretation of that concluding description of melodious composition as 'taking control over our thought processes' (*παντοίως ἡμῶν τῆς διανοίας ἐπικρατοῦσαν*). The control involved here is distinct in

²⁷ As regards the Corybantic, Longinus had already used the verb *κορυβαντιᾶν* at 5.1 as a disparaging metaphor for the novelty-seeking 'crazes' of his contemporaries: although the two passages are on different levels, the earlier usage hints at something less than deep esteem for the idea of Corybantic experience (literal or metaphorical). For a different reading of the contrast with music at 39.1–3, see Walsh 1988: 254–7.

quality from the 'Corybantic' frenzy or the 'bewitchment' of various kinds of music. While the latter are, for Longinus, non-cognitive effects (matters, he even suggests, of 'the hearing alone', although this makes it hard to see how they could be called *pathos* at all), the impact of sublime composition in language engages the thinking or reflective mind, *διάνοια*.²⁸ And that in turn affects how we should interpret the 'control' of the sublime over the mind: not as a mere imposition of mental force, whatever Longinus' own partiality for hyperbolic images of violence, but as a powerfully charged *arousal* and heightening of other minds' thoughts and feelings by the expressive greatness with which the writer's own mind has infused his words.

Further evidence that the ecstasy of the Longinian sublime cannot be properly understood as an irrational 'possession' is the important statement in chapter 7 that a test of authentic *hypsos* is whether a piece of writing makes a cognitive impression which outlasts the immediate experience of hearing or reading. The language of this passage repays close attention. It speaks, in the first place, of a transformative *plenitude* which is brought into being by a direct encounter with the sublime: the soul, in a kind of exaltation and expansion, 'is filled' (*πληροῦται*) with joy and pride, 'as if it had itself given birth to what it has heard' (*ὡς αὐτὴ γεννήσασα ὅπερ ἤκουσεν*, 7.3). This famous *aperçu*, which surely carries connotations of Diotima's account of the 'pregnancy' of the soul in Plato's *Symposium* (as well as prefiguring the Nietzschean principle that 'the effect of works of art is the arousal of the state of mind which *creates* art'), provides the author's most striking evocation of what counts, in the terms of my argument, as the ecstasy of the sublime.²⁹ But it is tellingly

²⁸ See 343–4 below on Longinus' use of *διάνοια*, and note that its workings include vivid imagination: cf. the phrase 'to sketch a scene in the mind' (*τῇ διανοίᾳ προσυπογράφειν*) at 14.2. 'The hearing alone': this construal of *τῆς ἀκοῆς μόνης* is required by the contrast with 'the very soul', despite the paradox it creates as regards musical *pathos*, and despite the fact that at 7.3 the phrase *μόνης τῆς ἀκοῆς* means 'only for the duration of hearing'; see 341–2 below and cf. Russell 1964: 85.

²⁹ The Nietzschean thesis ('die Wirkung der Kunstwerke ist die *Erregung des kunstschaaffendes Zustandes*': N.'s emphasis) is found in a note of 1888: Nietzsche 1988: xiii 241; cf. von Reibnitz 1992: 14 for an early interest of Nietzsche's in *On the Sublime*. A further parallel is with Tolstoy's 'infection' theory of art (*What is Art?*, first publ. 1898): 'the recipient . . . is so united to the artist that he feels as if the work were his own', Tolstoy 1930: 228; ironically, the same idea also occurs in a passage of

presented as a process which involves not so much a loss of self as a realization or fulfilment of the soul's inner potential; though activated by the words of another, it brings about a dynamic and quasi-creative transformation of the hearer's state of mind. This aspect of the passage is confirmed by the claim Longinus proceeds to make about the propensity of the 'true sublime' to supply a sort of lasting *surplus of meaning* which provides material for permanently renewed contemplation. It is intrinsic to his notion of *hupsos*, one might say, that it 'demands rereading'—to adapt a formulation from one of Longinus' most ardent modern admirers.³⁰ The psychology of the sublime is therefore intensely productive both in the moment of experience and in its lasting impression on the mind.

Moreover, although Longinus stresses that the strength of the sublime's effect does not diminish with repeated acquaintance, his conception of the enduring impression that it makes is not limited to duplication of the first experience. His 'test' of authentic sublimity goes further than that, requiring a richness of significance which 'leaves behind for the mind's reflection material for renewed contemplation which is more than what is actually said' (ἐγκαταλείπη τῇ διανοίᾳ πλεῖον τοῦ λεγομένου τὸ ἀναθεωρούμενον).³¹ This surplus of meaning, as I have called it, with the 'indelible memory' that it creates, establishes beyond any doubt that for Longinus the sublime is a quality of writing with extensive cognitive repercussions. Experience of it expands in the mind over time, lending itself not just to repetition but to progressively closer contemplation (denoted by both the

Mallarmé ('cette joie délicieuse de croire qu'ils créent') which Tolstoy himself criticizes for other reasons, *ibid.* 158. For the Longinian notion of creatively 'giving birth', *γεννᾶν* (or 'begetting'), cf. the 'pregnant' (ἐγκύμων) mind's receptivity to greatness at 9.1 (with the Delphic image at 13.2): Longinus never cites Plato's *Symposium*, but the link both here and at 7.2 with Diotima's speech (esp. *Symp.* 205b–209e) is inescapable. Cf. Ch. 5 n. 2, Ch. 6 n. 154, for other uses of *γεννᾶν*.

³⁰ See Bloom 1994: 30, defining 'the canonical', which for him is effectively synonymous with sublimity; cf. n. 79 below.

³¹ *Subl.* 7.3: both syntax and semantics (cf. ἀναθεώρησις in the following sentence) make it unlikely that τὸ ἀναθεωρούμενον is the subject of ἐγκαταλείπη, as translated by Donadi (2005: 147), rather than its object. For the significance of διάνοια, see 340 above, with 343–4 below.

verb ἀναθεωρεῖν and the noun ἀναθεώρησις in the present passage) and to the discovery of deeper layers of meaning than the prima-facie sense of the words discloses.

The testimony of chapter 7 shows, then, that while parts of Longinus' treatise highlight the transfigurative moment of contact with the sublime, he does not conceive of that ecstatic impact as a self-sufficient mode of experiencing the greatness of mind given expression by poets and other writers. Furthermore, we can see from the idiom of this section—the language of the soul's being 'exalted', 'filled', 'giving birth', and drawn into a process of expanding contemplation—that it is indispensable for the Longinian sublime that it should activate and stimulate the unrestricted, self-generative possibilities of the mind, rather than bringing it to an awareness of its own limits, as in some eighteenth-century (and more recent) versions of the concept, a point we shall later see illustrated in a contrast between Longinus and Edmund Burke. Even Kant, for whom the sublime enables the mind to appreciate something about its own powers of reason, takes the experience of sublimity to involve coming up against the limits of thought or imagination, and therefore diagnoses in it an element of what he calls 'negative pleasure': the mind is simultaneously elevated *and* frustrated in its attempts to imagine or grasp things too vast for its comprehension, whether in the form of the 'mathematical' sublime (where ideas of incomprehensible magnitude are concerned) or the 'dynamical' sublime (where ideas of nature's colossal forces are contemplated).³² In contrast to this and to other modern notions of the sublime as entailing a degree of cognitive failure or inadequacy, Longinian *hupsos* infallibly brings with it the promise of a fulfilment and enlargement of the mind's own potential. It operates through a sense of the removal or transcendence of limits, not a confrontation with impediments placed in the path of thought.³³

³² Kant's discussion is in *The Critique of Judgement* §§23–9: for 'negative pleasure' ('negative Lust') see §23, Kant 1913: 245, tr. in Kant 2000: 129. For Kant, the sublime exists 'only in the mind' ('Also ist die Erhabenheit . . . nur in unserem Gemüte enthalten', spelling modernized), §28, Kant 1913: 264, 2000: 147. Cf. Guyer's introduction, Kant 2000: pp. xxx–xxxii, for a summary. Murdoch (1997: 206–14) has some brief but probing comments on the Kantian sublime.

³³ For convenient references to several versions of the sublime which involve 'cognitive failure', see Forsey 2007: 381–2.

METAPHYSICS, REALISM, IMAGINATION:
THE COMPLEX TRUTH OF THE SUBLIME

If Longinus' model of the sublime incorporates a transformative ecstasy mediated through both the cognitive and the emotional powers of the mind, it remains a challenging problem to identify just what kind of cognitive content might belong to experience of sublimity, and harder still to elucidate what claims such content can make to the status of 'truth'. The role played by the value of truth in the arguments advanced by the treatise is irreducibly complex. One can get some sense of this complexity by starting from a specific point of connection between chapter 7, cited above, and chapter 35, a section of cardinal importance where Longinus describes the greatest writers as 'demigods', or 'equal to the gods' (*ισόθεοι*), in virtue of the ambitious scope of their vision of reality. Although chapter 35 contains a number of philosophical commonplaces relating to the human capacity for 'spectatorship' of the cosmos (and even, in a motif whose resonance with the myth in Plato's *Phaedrus* has been generally overlooked, a capacity to enter in thought into realms *beyond* the cosmos), Longinus' originality consists in weaving these ideas into a system of values which centres not on abstract theorizing but on the experience of great 'literature' (especially poetry and oratory), as well as allowing to some extent for a more general, quasi-aesthetic experience of natural phenomena such as rivers, the ocean, the night sky, and volcanoes (35.4).³⁴ In declaring that 'even the entirety of the cosmos is not sufficient to satisfy the mind's contemplative reach, but our conceptions often pass beyond the boundaries of the universe' (*τῇ θεωρίας καὶ διανοίας τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης ἐπιβολῇ οὐδ' ὁ σύμπας κόσμος ἀρκεῖ, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοὺς τοῦ περιέχοντος πολλάκις ὄρους ἐκβαίνουσιν αἱ ἐπίνοιαι*³⁵), Longinus combines the vocabulary of quasi-philosophical

³⁴ On the philosophical commonplaces of ch. 35, see Mazzucchi 1992: 261–4, Russell 1964: 165–6; but neither registers the boldness of Longinus' transference of the motifs onto a model of sublime *writing*, nor adduces the image in Plato's *Phaedrus* of the divine soul's elevation into the 'supra-celestial' (*ὑπερουράνιος*) realm of timeless being (*Phdr.* 247c, cf. 248a): these passages of *Phaedrus*, with their equestrian imagery, may also be at the back of Longinus' mind at 9.5, where he comments on the potentially extra-cosmic stride of the gods' horses at *Iliad* 5.770–2. See further on ch. 35 at 353, 367 below.

³⁵ The text of Longinus' sentence at 35.3, *διόπερ κτλ*, is uncertain; Russell and Mazzucchi give different versions of Ruhnken's emendation. But there is no doubt

contemplation or vision (*theôria*) with that of 'mind' or 'thought' (*dianoia*: here profoundly reflective intelligence) in a way which matches a key passage of Plato's *Republic*—the famous description of philosophy as 'contemplation of all time and all being'—that he is certainly recalling, at least subconsciously, in this section.³⁶ The only other place in the treatise where these two word-groups, *theôria* and *dianoia*, are brought together is in chapter 7's account of how the authentically sublime 'leaves behind for the mind's reflection material for renewed contemplation which is more than what is actually said' (341 above). But since chapter 35 treats all Longinus' canon of pre-eminent writers (Homer or Demosthenes just as much as Plato) as quasi-philosophical visionaries ('what was it they *saw*?', he asks, 35.2: *τί ποτ' οὖν εἶδον οἱ ἰσόθεοι ἐκείνοι...*) who have given exemplary expression to the human yearning for greatness, there are grounds, at first sight, for regarding the inexhaustible 'surplus of meaning' which chapter 7 ascribes to sublime writing as a quality which must itself lead the mind towards a metaphysical plane of truth.

There is, however, an obvious objection to such an inference. Only a few of the concrete examples of *hupsos* cited in the course of the treatise have any evidently metaphysical content or orientation. The majority of them are concerned with naturalistic, historical, political, military, or psychological subject-matter. So it cannot straightforwardly be the case that most pieces of sublime writing communicate directly metaphysical truths to hearer or reader. In fact, when Longinus himself speaks of 'truth' in connection with the sublime, he sometimes foregrounds realistic or naturalistic elements which are far removed from the sphere of a visionary metaphysics. This is

about the main terms used. The reference in *τοὺς τοῦ περιέχοντος... ὅρους* to the boundaries of the cosmos is distorted by the tr. 'our surroundings' in Russell (1972) 404, and consequently misinterpreted as (quasi-)geographical by Porter 2001: 65. Cf. Roberts 1907: 205. The use of *τὸ περιέχον* for the outer reaches of the universe is at least as old as Anaxagoras (B2, B14 DK); it may even go back to Anaximander: see Taylor 1928: 86.

³⁶ Pl. *Resp.* 6.486a8–9, where there are textual uncertainties which do not affect my argument. That Longinus was influenced by recollection of this passage is confirmed by the double link (a contrast between grand and petty matters, and the verb *ἐπορεύεσθαι*) between *Subl.* 39.2 and *Resp.* 6.486a5–6; cf. Mazzucchi 1992: 261. Note, however, that in the Platonic passage Socrates suggests that human life as a whole can hardly be thought 'something great', *μέγα τι*: not a sentiment with which Longinus exactly concurs. On Longinus' general relationship to Plato, cf. Innes 2002: 259–69.

clearly so with his judgement on the *Iliad* as a work whose dynamic sense of drama is 'densely filled with visualizations based on reality' (literally, taken 'from the truth itself', 9.13: *ταῖς ἐκ τῆς ἀληθείας φαντασίαις καταπεπυκνωμένον*). It is equally so with the similar phrasing which accompanies his view that Sappho consistently depicts erotic madness by selecting and recombining psychological and physical symptoms taken 'from the truth itself' (*ἐκ τῆς ἀληθείας αὐτῆς*, 10.1). In both these cases, 'truth' is measured by the standard of vivid immediacy and lived experience, as opposed to fantastic, far-fetched imaginings. It is not a matter, for sure, of commonplace or documentary realism: that would be incompatible with the intensity of the sublime and its special pitch of expressiveness.³⁷ The texts in question, on Longinus' readings, transform a sensitivity to real experience into the stuff of powerfully concentrated, poetically heightened moments of thought and feeling. Sappho's selection of 'the extremes' (*τὰ ἄκρα*) of erotic pathology, its symptomatic sensations 'stretched almost to breaking point' (*ὑπερτεταμένα*), is doubly emphasized (10.1, 3), and the praise of her and Homer's 'truth to life' is not intended to circumvent Longinus' general principle that 'art' is always a skilful (and skilfully concealed) *simulation*, never a raw presentation, of nature.³⁸ Nonetheless, part of the power of these texts is taken to consist in their fidelity to recognizably authentic human experience ('all such things happen to those passionately in love', 10.3), whether on the battlefield or in the emotional torments of erotic passion. It is certainly not easy to see how to integrate this criterion of truth, or truthfulness, into the metaphysical perspective constructed from philosophical paradigms of cosmic spectatorship and the grandeur of nature in chapter 35. I shall argue, even so, that there does exist a subtle link between these different components of Longinus' scheme of values.

³⁷ Contrast the combination of (reconceived) sublimity with realism in Auerbach (1953): see the interpretation of Doran (2007).

³⁸ This is nicely illustrated at 18.2, where a similar phrase to those at 9.13 and 10.1 (*ἀπ' αὐτῆς τῆς ἀληθείας*, 'from the truth itself') is used of the spontaneous emotional candour of those being cross-examined (in real life), but in a context which recommends a Demosthenic mimesis of such situations, i.e. a sort of vivid *illusion* of spontaneity. On the concept of mimesis in Longinus cf. Halliwell 2002a: 310–12. Matelli (2007) provides a wide-ranging set of reflections on the relationship of 'art' (*technê*) and 'nature' in the treatise.

There are further complications which need to be confronted if the role played by various types of truth in *On the Sublime* is to be clarified. Some of these come urgently to light in the reservations which Longinus expresses in chapter 9 about Homer's depiction of the gods in the *theomachia* of the *Iliad*. What matters most for my purposes about this much-discussed passage is that it is only after citing with admiration an awesome Iliadic image of the scale of the cataclysm (the splitting open of Hades itself) threatened by the divine conflict on the plain of Troy that Longinus pulls back and observes that such images would count as 'totally irreligious' (παντάπασιν ἄθρα) if not understood in allegorical terms (κατ' ἀλληγορίαν).³⁹ We can trace in this hesitation a sense of competing forces beneath the surface of the argument, but also a determination to protect, as it were, the imaginative power of the Homeric descriptions against literalist objections. The sublimity of thought and emotion to be found in the theomachy's images (its *phantasmata*, 9.6, almost 'apparitions')⁴⁰ is not at issue for Longinus; what prompts his reservation is the question of their theological admissibility and truth. Allegoresis is needed not to make possible the sublime but to prevent it falling foul of a separate test of value; as a principle of interpretation it is appealed to only in a secondary or defensive critical strategy. Longinus, that is to say, makes allegorical meaning a kind of rider to, not a constituent part of, his response to the theomachy: the latter's evocation of potentially cosmic disorder ('the upheaval and splitting of the entire cosmos', ἀνατροπήν δὲ ὅλου καὶ διάστασιν τοῦ κόσμου) would presumably cease to be sublime for him if actually decoded into either naturalistic or abstractly ethical terms.⁴¹

The sequence of thought in this passage of the treatise conveys a Platonically tinged nervousness, but also a resistance to the most radical version of a Platonist stance on poetic depictions of divinity.

³⁹ *Subl.* 9.7. Cf. Mazzucchi 1992: 170–1, Lombardo 2007: 84–5. Obbink (2004: 176–8) draws attention to a close parallel between Longinus' criticism of the sufferings of Homeric gods and a passage in Philodemus' *On Piety*; but this hardly has much bearing, pace Obbink, on the dating of *On the Sublime*.

⁴⁰ See 347–50 below on ch. 15's treatment of *phantasia*.

⁴¹ The Iliadic theomachy had been allegorized in one or both of these ways as early as the 6th cent. BC by Theagenes of Rhegium (A2 DK): see Lanata 1963: 104–11, Pfeiffer 1968: 9–11, Richardson 1975: 65–77, Feeney 1991: 8–11, and the larger perspective of Ford 2002: 67–89. On the development of Greek allegoresis, cf. Russell and Konstan 2005: pp. xiii–xxvii, Struck 2004, Obbink 2010.

In fact, the admired quotation (or, more precisely, edited quotations) from the theomachy at 9.6 happens to include lines specifically 'expunged' by Socrates in book 3 of the *Republic*, a section of that dialogue, what's more, where allegoresis had earlier been explicitly rejected as a defence of religiously problematic myths. Although Socrates disapproves of *Iliad* 20.64–5 (the last two lines of Longinus' quotation) at *Republic* 3.386d because of concern with the negative image of Hades as such, rather than with its larger context in the theomachy, the latter itself was explicitly condemned at an earlier stage of his critique of poetry (2.378b–d); and it was precisely in rejecting as 'untrue' narratives of divine fighting and warfare that Socrates had refused to allow Homer's theomachy to be performed in his city, 'whether composed with allegorical meaning (ἐν ὑπονοίαις) or without it'.⁴² In other words, Longinus acknowledges the legitimacy of a Platonic standard of judgement but partly counterbalances it—only partly, since he proceeds to admit a general disquiet about Homeric depictions of divine misfortunes (9.7)—by making room for a sort of fictionalized poetic space within which the psychological conditions of the sublime can be fulfilled. This raises a larger question about the relationship between experience of sublimity and the demands of philosophical theory. But it must at least mean that some instances of sublimity can exist independently of, or at any rate be 'exempted' from, one of the most important kinds (or frameworks) of truth, i.e. philosophically doctrinal theology.⁴³

The careful though incomplete steps which Longinus takes in chapter 9 to clarify his position on the *Iliad*'s images of gods in battle reflect a larger uncertainty in parts of the treatise about the relationship between (in my shorthand) ecstasy and truth. Some light can be thrown on the underlying elements of what is at stake by chapter 15. Longinus here advocates the use of *phantasia*, intense imagination or

⁴² *Resp.* 2.378d: this passage, which must allude to the ideas of Theagenes of Rhegium and others (previous note), makes immediate reference to the inability of the *young* to understand whether allegory is present in a poetic text; but the critique of poetry in this part of *Resp.* is not limited to the experiences of the young; see Halliwell 2002a: 50 n. 32. Cf. Ch. 4 n. 28.

⁴³ At *Subl.* 1.3 Longinus treats 'beneficence and truth(fulness)' (εὐεργεσίαν καὶ ἀλήθειαν) as defining attributes of the gods; note that this corresponds to the principles employed at *Pl. Resp.* 2.379a ff. for the critique of Homer and other poets (cf. n. 42 above). But with the partial exception of *Subl.* 9.7, such ideas do not actively impinge on his judgements concerning sublime texts in which the gods appear.

'visualization' (also called *εἰδωλοποιΐα*, a conjuring up of scenes before the mind's eye), as a major source of the sublime. But he also draws a distinction between the different kinds of *phantasia* which he believes belong to rhetoric and poetry. Although he retraces some familiar ground in rhetorical thinking about imaginative vividness, what matters most for my present purposes is a tension which can be glimpsed in the terms of Longinus' argument.⁴⁴ He starts by stating that the point of poetic visualization is the stunning (emotional) impact he calls *ekplêxis* (near-synonymous for him, as we have seen, with *ekstasis*). The function of rhetorical visualization, on the other hand, he limits to vivid immediacy, *enargeia*, which he judges later on by the benchmark of what is feasible and realistic (*τὸ ἔμπρακτον καὶ ἐνάληθες*, 15.8). This contrast suggests that it is wholly appropriate for sublime poetry to aim to create in its audiences a sort of ecstatic 'loss of self', or a transformed sense of self; and it is no accident that, against that background, Longinus turns first to Euripidean examples of the representation of Orestes' madness. But there is a paradoxical implication here: the more the poet succeeds in visualizing and transmitting the inner subjectivity of Orestes' frenzied mental state, the more the audience's experience of the sublime will itself approximate to a kind of madness. This is an extreme case of poetic *phantasia*, then, one which tests the limits of sublime 'participation' in, or identification with, another's consciousness. But some of Longinus' other examples too, including Phaethon's celestial journey in the chariot of the sun (15.3–4), lie near the edges of what is humanly imaginable at all. That is why, after illustrating poetic *phantasia* with examples from all three of the canonical Athenian tragedians, Longinus seems to pull back from unqualified endorsement. He says that such *phantasia* displays a sort of fictional exaggeration or 'mythic excess' (*μυθικωτέραν . . . τὴν ὑπερέκπτωσιν*) and overshoots the bounds of what is credible or persuasive, *pistos* (15.8).⁴⁵

⁴⁴ For the rhetorical traditions regarding *phantasia*, *enargeia*, etc., cf. the further references in Russell 1964: 121, Mazzucchi 1992: 206–12, Lombardo 2007: 92–5. Watson 1988a: 66–70, 1988b: 215–16 moots the possibility of Stoic sources behind the notion of *phantasia* as capable of visualizing even what it has not seen.

⁴⁵ Longinus' contrast between 'mythic excess' and realistic visualization in rhetoric coincides with two of the three modes of poetic discourse in Σ^{b1} Hom. *Il.* 14.342–51 (cf. Ch. 5 n. 18): *μυθικωτέραν . . . τὴν ὑπερέκπτωσιν* at *Subl.* 15.8 matches *καθ' ὑπέρθεσιν ἀληθείας* in the scholia.

Now part of Longinus' anxiety in this context concerns the danger of using poetic extremes of visualization in *rhetoric*. He comments sarcastically on contemporary orators who fail to grasp that Orestes only 'saw' the Furies *because* he was mad. But when he then switches to illustrating how rhetorical visualization, even with its greater constraints, can still convey powerful, agitated emotion, there is a revealing equivocation in his position. Effective rhetorical *phantasia* is said not only to persuade but to 'enslave' the hearer (15.9), a formulation which seems to hark back to chapter 1's statement that the sublime produces ecstasy rather than persuasion (330 above). Shortly afterwards, indeed, he praises a passage of Hyperides which he says has gone beyond the bounds of persuasion (15.10), which makes rhetorical visualization sound rather like poetic *phantasia* after all. Longinus adds, in fact, that rhetorical visualization has the power to overshadow rational argument or demonstration and to draw its audiences forcefully into the experience of *explêxis*, which at the start of the chapter was specifically the hallmark of poetic but *not* rhetorical visualization. After proposing that visualization ought to work in tandem with persuasive argument, Longinus ends up conceding that the former carries a psychological impetus of its own which not only resists but can displace the practical pressures of the latter. He leaves it very uncertain how easily the two things can be integrated after all.⁴⁶

Chapter 15, then, points to a possible tension between the demands of transformative ecstasy and at least one type of truth. Longinus acknowledges that poetic sublimity, in its pursuit of emotionally transporting effects, has a positive freedom to abandon the restraints of the real, but he also hints at a degree of unease over the self-generating fiction which may result from this freedom. Equally, he feels a need to protect rhetorical visualization from the excesses of poetic invention; yet we have seen that after drawing this line of demarcation he seems to accept that the dynamics of 'poetic' visualization have a tendency to force their way into emotionally charged oratory too, and not always unsuccessfully. We sense an oscillation on both sides of the argument of chapter 15: a movement of thought which draws Longinus simultaneously towards and away from the

⁴⁶ Cf. Meijering 1987: 25–6, 71–2; at 247 n. 53 she notes the discrepancies in ch. 15, but her conclusion, that the difference 'appears to be a relative one', understates the tension in Longinus' position.

potent extremes of creative imagination. What's more, this is one of many places in the treatise where the argument seems to mirror and enact the phenomena it analyses. The overcoming of a weaker by a stronger force to which he appeals at the end of the chapter describes his own train of thought as well as it does the workings of *phantasia* in the kinds of oratory he adduces here. But to say that is not to resolve the uncertainties which chapter 15 exposes. It is easy enough to understand why a rhetorician should be anxious to constrain imaginative visualization in the interests of keeping it compatible with the forensic or political issues that orators have to deal with. It is less easy, though, to understand where the somewhat unstable contrasts drawn in chapter 15 leave the relationship between ecstasy and truth. This is all the more so given the affinities between that chapter and the famous contrast between the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* in chapter 9, where the (relative) decline from greatness in the second epic is said to be associated with 'mythologized and unconvincing' elements (τοῖς μυθώδεσι καὶ ἀπίστοις, 9.13).⁴⁷ Somewhat ironically, the *Iliad* is praised for qualities of dramatic realism which are closer to 'rhetorical' than to 'poetic' uses of *phantasia* as defined in chapter 15, while the *Odyssey* is (partly) faulted for characteristics treated as quintessentially poetic in that later passage. One strand in the 'truth' of *hupsos* becomes entangled, it seems, in a never fully resolved competition between rhetorical and poetic desiderata within Longinus' critical perspective.

I have drawn attention so far to three divergent ways in which the Longinian conception of the sublime positions itself in relation to the possibilities of 'truth'. In the first place, chapter 35's presentation of the greatest writers as figures who cultivate to the highest degree the human capacity to encompass in thought the entire cosmos (and beyond) tends to suggest that the sublime is anchored in a vision of metaphysical and philosophical truth. Secondly, some of Longinus' comments on the *Iliad* and on Sappho indicate that the sublime can embody and convey the truth of veracious realism, a close fidelity to authentic forms of experience. Thirdly, Longinus' reservations about the theology of the Iliadic theomachy imply that some instances of the sublime can operate on a level at which

⁴⁷ Cf. μυθῶδες (following μυθικωτέραν: see my text above) at *Subl.* 15.8, applied to the fabricated imaginings of some orators. On older uses of this term, see Ch. 1 n. 44, Ch. 6, 291–4.

imaginative visions (*phantasmata*) are more important than philosophically acceptable standards of truth, while chapter 15 shows that there is a larger uncertainty about whether the requirements that attach to the sublime's production of ecstatic states of mind can always be reconciled with the conditions of 'truth'. It looks very hard, at first sight, to discern here any consistent stance on the relationship between sublimity and truth.

To proceed beyond this point, we need a more probing analysis of the kinds of truth which do and do not matter to Longinus' argument. Two kinds of truth can, I think, be put (largely) on one side. One of these is plain propositional truth. The treatise nowhere leads us to believe that a piece of writing can be sublime in virtue of explicitly formulating true propositions about the world, even though it does tell us that sublimity often consists in a single 'thought' or 'intuition' (*noêma*, 12.1), a remark to which I shall soon return. In fact, Longinus would surely classify propositional truths, expressed in declarative form, under the heading of *apodeixis*, 'proof' or 'demonstrative reasoning'—something he several times mentions as an aspect of rhetoric separate from and, for his purposes, inferior to the sublime.⁴⁸ Given that he comments in one place on how Demosthenes 'converts' or 'transposes' (*μεθιστάναι*) a piece of *apodeixis* into the sublime, we are entitled to infer that, even if a sublime piece of writing is couched in the form of a proposition or series of propositions, its sublimity will be something *more* than the truth contained in it/them.⁴⁹

The second kind of truth we can identify as largely extraneous to the project of *On the Sublime* is the complex 'truth' that might be ascribed to the totality of a literary work's descriptive, narrative, dramatic, or thematic structure. The treatise notoriously shows little interest in the organization or integrated fabric of complete works. Northrop Frye had some justification for drawing a large critical contrast between an Aristotelian point of view, concerned with a work's 'single form', and a Longinian point of view, which treats a work as 'a series of ecstatic moments or points of expanding apprehension'.⁵⁰ Admittedly, Longinus speaks of one source of sublimity as an ability

⁴⁸ *Subl.* 12.2 (the verb *ἀποδεικνύναι*, defining the function of rhetorical *pistis*), 15.11, 16.2–3. At 10.1 the verb *ἀποδεικνύναι* is used in a more general comment on the excellence of Sappho's writing.

⁴⁹ Conversion of *apodeixis* into *hupsos*: see *Subl.* 16.2, with 364–6 below.

⁵⁰ Frye 1957: 326. Cf. Köhnken 2006: 578.

to combine and interweave carefully chosen elements into, as it were, a 'single body' (ἐν τι σῶμα), a phrase reminiscent of the section of Plato's *Phaedrus* where Socrates puts forward a principle of rhetorico-literary unity as making a discourse (*logos*) 'cohere like an organism, with a body of its own'.⁵¹ It is significant, however, that this remark prefaces the quotation of Sappho's intense lyric, φαίνεται μοι (fr. 31 PLF), a work whose compactness helps to show that what Longinus has in mind with his notion of binding things into 'a single body' (a rather ironic phrase where Sappho's depiction of physical *dissolution* is concerned) is more a matter of density of texture than structural cohesion on an extended scale.⁵² That the treatise privileges the qualities of particular passages over those of complete works (except where, as in Sappho's case, a short lyric is involved) is underlined near the outset when Longinus specifically contrasts the thunderbolt-like flash of sublimity, the *coup de foudre* which 'reveals the concentrated power of the speaker instantaneously', with facility in (rhetorical) 'invention' (εὕρεσις), 'ordering' or design (τάξις), and 'arrangement' of materials (οἰκονομία) which 'we see gradually emerging from the entire fabric of the writing' (ἐκ τοῦ ὅλου τῶν λόγων ὕφους).⁵³ These priorities explain why Longinus makes no comment on, for example, the design or overall meaning of the *Iliad*, nor of any of the other longer works he cites. He might believe, for sure, that in some of the greatest works, including the *Iliad*, the sublime occurs in many

⁵¹ *Subl.* 10.1. See Pl. *Phdr.* 264c: δεῖν πάντα λόγον ὥσπερ ζῶον συνεστάναι σῶμά τι ἑχόντα αὐτὸν αὐτοῦ.

⁵² Note Longinus' use of the noun *πύκνωσις*, 'packing closely together', for the kind of concentrated texture which Sappho's poem exemplifies. There is a link here with his description of the *Iliad* at 9.13 as 'densely filled with visualizations based on reality', ταῖς ἐκ τῆς ἀληθείας φαντασίαις καταπεπνυκνωμένον: the appeal to a kind of realism in both cases (see 344–5 above) is independent of structural considerations. 'Amalgamation into a unity', εἰς ἐνότητα σύνταξις, 11.3, refers back to the remarks on texture at 10.1.

⁵³ *Subl.* 1.4. The influence on Romantic criticism of this Longinian model of literary intensity (a property of individual passages rather than an attribute of a work's overall design) is documented by Abrams 1953: 132–8; cf. Abrams 1989: 16–17. According to Hertz (1983: esp. 591), Longinus' critical method consists in a fragmentation of literary 'bodies' in order to make the materials of his own work. Innes (1995a) argues that Longinus' treatise achieves its own organic unity through the interweaving of themes and images: perhaps so, though this does not change the fact that Longinus virtually ignores the overall structure of the works from which his examples are taken. Porter (2001: esp. 67, 81–4) relates Longinus' fragmentation of texts to a larger sensibility ('a survey of remains') regarding the precarious survival and partially 'ruined' condition of earlier Greek culture.

passages and perhaps even lends to these works a cumulative tone or ethos.⁵⁴ But even in such cases the 'truth' of the sublime, whatever else it might turn out to be, will be different from anything that could be construed as the truth of the work as a dramatically unified conception of human life or suffering.

We can, however, go further than this. There is an important sense in which the truth of the Longinian sublime may be *incompatible* with the 'whole truth' of certain works which are nonetheless evaluated as rich in *hupsos*. Take, in particular, the view held by many Greeks that the *Iliad* is a tragic work—that in its narrative and thematic totality it offers a compellingly pessimistic outlook on human existence. But the Longinian sublime itself, unlike some later versions of the sublime, is defiantly anti-tragic. It affirms the godlike, creative potential of the human mind as a fulfilment of that cosmic 'spectatorship' for which nature, according to chapter 35, has brought us into being; and at the level of emotion it has a place for certain (though not all) kinds of fear, but none at all for pity, which Longinus clearly regards as a 'low' emotion.⁵⁵ Since Longinus presents no reasons to contest the view that the *Iliad* as a whole is a darkly pessimistic work, it is plausible to suppose that the moments of the sublime which he finds in the work must be dissociated from the significance of the work as a whole.

⁵⁴ Hence the phrase 'the whole body [sc. of the *Iliad*]', ὅλον τὸ σωματίον (9.13), refers to the work's general ethos or atmosphere, not its structural or thematic unity. At 40.1, an analogy with the body illustrates the 'organic' structure not of works but of individual sentences. For various uses of such vocabulary in rhetorical texts, cf. Heath 1989: 97–101.

⁵⁵ *Subl.* 8.2 classifies 'pitiful, painful and fearful types of emotion' (οἴκτοι λῦπαι φόβοι) as 'low' or 'mean' (ταπεινά) and far removed from sublimity; cf. the disjunction between οἴκτοι and *hupsos* at 11.2, and note that the *Odyssey's* scenes of 'lamentation and pity' (τὰς ὀλοφύρσεις καὶ τοὺς οἴκτους) are associated, at least obliquely, with Homer's ebbing powers (9.12). There is a kind of fear or fearsomeness (δέος, τὸ φοβερόν) which can contribute to the sublime (see esp. 10.5–6, 34.4), but only on condition that it is conducive to uplifting, 'heroic' feelings. See Innes 1995b. On Longinus' attitude to tragedy, including traces in the treatise of a conception of tragedy 'beyond pity', cf. Halliwell 2005a: 409–11. NB how at 15.3 Longinus tacitly appropriates the adj. τραγικός as a near-synonym of 'sublime', implicitly stripping it of associations with the pitiful: significantly, he cites Euripides' *Phaethon* not for the disaster which strikes the young hero but for the aspirations with which he sets out across the sky; for the place of the messenger speech (from which the quotation is taken) in the play, see Diggle 1970: 41–2, Collard 1995: 201. One later version of the sublime which is entirely hospitable to the tragic is that of Schopenhauer (though he denies in turn that fear can be the ultimate aim of tragedy): see Schopenhauer 1988: ii. 503–4, iv. 516, tr. respectively in Schopenhauer 1966: ii. 433, 1974: ii. 600.

The ramifications of that point have not, I think, been sufficiently recognized. The sublime, on Longinus' understanding of it, may perfectly well operate in isolation from and even *in resistance* to the broader character of a poem, a speech, or some other large-scale piece of writing. This possibility is connected to the fact that for Longinus the sublime seems to know few if any restrictions of genre: it can be accommodated in epic, didactic, lyric (both monodic and choral), iambos, tragedy, oratory, historiography, philosophy, and even, at least occasionally, in comedy.⁵⁶ Many of the things which constitute or distinguish genres (formal conventions, typical subject-matter, kinds of characters, and stylistic registers) may not themselves be decisive determinants of when or how the sublime—a supreme excellence of discourse (*logos*), with a capacity to communicate a kind of 'ecstasy' (1.3–4) or transformation of consciousness—will come into being. Floating substantially free of both the parameters of genre and the larger organizing principles of complete works, *hupsos* has a sort of autonomous energy of its own.

But where does this leave the scope of the sublime to attain to 'truth', a truth which cannot be pinned down, so I have suggested, either to declarative propositions or to comprehensive literary structures of meaning? I think that some positive light can be shed on Longinus' undertaking if one brings to bear on it a tripartite schema of truth-types. I shall call the varieties (or aspects) of truth in question intuitive truth, emotional truth, and metaphysical truth. These categories can be defined relatively simply, and I have in fact already touched on two of them; the challenge is to see how, behind the diverse examples and readings which Longinus offers us, they are ultimately interrelated. By intuitive truth, I mean the direct contact with greatness of mind (itself an assurance of insight into the real) involved in the act of grasping or assimilating sublime 'thoughts' (for which Longinus uses principally the vocabulary of *νοήσεις*, *νοήματα*,

⁵⁶ Occasional sublimity is ascribed to Aristophanes at *Subl.* 40.2. At 16.3 Longinus counters those who apparently thought the Marathon oath in Eupolis fr. 106 was sublime: as it happens, the late treatise of Platon. *Diff. com.* p. 6 Koster (p. 38.15 Perusino = Eup. test. 34 PCG) calls Eupolis *ὑψηλός*, 'sublime' or 'lofty'; cf. Perusino 1989: 72–3, Storey 2003: 47–50, 136. Russell (1964: 57) speaks of 'whole genres of literature' which cannot achieve sublimity but does not identify them. Longinus' concept is also extended, famously of course, to the Hebrew Genesis, *Subl.* 9.9: on this passage see West (1995), Usher (2007).

ἐννοιαί).⁵⁷ This act is 'intuitive' in the sense that it need not entail a discursively formalized frame of reference or an explicit chain of reasoning: to take a conveniently concise example, the Longinian reader/hearer of the opening of the funeral oration presented in Plato's *Menexenus*, as cited at *On the Sublime* 28.2, is taken to appreciate the stirring, uplifting resonance (a musical analogy is added) of the idea of death as a 'destined' or 'apportioned journey' (εἰμαρμένην πορείαν) on which the deceased are 'escorted' by the city's funeral rites, but no specific religious proposition or doctrine (e.g. of the soul's existence in an afterlife) comes into play.⁵⁸ By my second category, 'emotional truth', one of the oldest values of Greek poetic and rhetorical criticism, I mean the authenticity of the intense emotions expressed and communicated by a sublime piece of writing: for the canon of 'authenticity' or genuineness as a kind of truth in this context, one can appeal, above all, to the start of chapter 22, where the use of hyperbaton (dislocated syntax or sequences of thought) is said to provide 'the truest stamp [or 'impress'] of urgent emotion' (χαρακτήρ ἐναγωνίου πάθους ἀληθέστατος).⁵⁹ Finally, by 'metaphysical truth' I mean the truth of what chapter 35 calls the penetrating 'vision' achieved by the demigods of literature, their vision ('what was it they saw?') of the grandeur of the cosmos but also their

⁵⁷ Cf. also the noun παράστημα (9.2): Russell 1964: 89, Mazzucchi 1992: 19, both prefer 'feeling' or 'excitation' to 'thought', but the continuation of the passage seems to me to favour the latter. The kind of 'intuition' I ascribe to Longinus is not, unlike that of some philosophers (including Croce, for whom aesthetic intuition is a 'lyrical' knowledge of particulars: e.g. Croce 1990: 70–1), conceptless or wholly distinct from conceptual thought. Longinian thought is always capable of articulation in language; cf. 'anything which produces [or, alternatively, constitutes] a mental conception productive of language' (ἐννόημα γεννητικὸν λόγου), in the broader definition of *phantasia* at 15.1, with Russell 1964: 120. But sublime thought is always something more than its conceptual 'content'; cf. my comments on its 'surplus of meaning', 340–2 above.

⁵⁸ It is difficult in general to infer the author's beliefs about the destiny of the soul. *Subl.* 9.7 might be thought to imply that death is the end of everything for humans; 44.8–9, on the other hand, refers to their 'immortal' element (τᾶθάνατα), though the context leaves this doctrinally vague (compatible, for instance, with a semi-metaphorical immortality through posthumous fame, for which cf. esp. 1.4, 14.3).

⁵⁹ In addition to 22.1, the adj. ἐναγωνίος, denoting (literally) what is appropriate to the intense pressure of 'competition' or debate (and in other authors sometimes signifying 'forensic' rhetoric), is associated with dramatic vividness and/or emotional urgency at 9.13, 15.9, 18.2 (on the context see n. 38 above), 25, 26.1. Cf. Meijering 1987: 287 n. 212, Nünlist 2009: 142.

demonstration of the human mind's potential to internalize that grandeur (or to find its echoes) within itself.

Although I cannot explore all the implications of each of these kinds of truth in full here, I shall try at least to expose some of the complexities which bind them together within the treatise's terms of reference. Longinus states unequivocally that 'exceptional boldness and vitality in the production of thoughts (*noêseis*)' (τὸ περὶ τὰς νοήσεις ἀδρεπήβολον, 8.1)⁶⁰ is the most potent of all the sources of the sublime, and I mentioned earlier his remark that the sublime often resides in a single thought or intuition (*noêma*, 12.1). But what reason is there to suppose that bold, extraordinary or, in general, 'great' thoughts need to be *true* thoughts (as opposed to truly sublime)? Longinus equates sublime thoughts with 'noble' (*gennaios*) or 'great-natured' (*megalophuês*) thoughts. Particularly important in this connection is chapter 9, which provides the context for the famous aphorism that 'sublimity is an echo of greatness of mind' (ὕψος μεγαλοφροσύνης ἀπήχημα, 9.2). Given the perspective of chapter 35, where the most pre-eminent writers are said to have achieved an inspired vision of the human relationship to the cosmos, sublime greatness of mind must have some connection with what I have called the metaphysics of sublimity. We can gain some sense of what kind of connection that might be by examining Longinus' very first example of a great thought in chapter 9, an example which illustrates how a single thought can in itself attain to sublimity but which also, on closer inspection, complicates the very notion of Longinian 'thought'.

The example in question is the implacable silence of Ajax in the underworld scene (*Nekyia*) of *Odyssey* 11, where his 'ghost' refuses to respond to Odysseus during the latter's conjuring up of the souls of the dead. Part of what is remarkable about Longinus' comment on the scene (9.2)—a comment intended to show that 'even without being voiced a thought in its own right can sometimes be an object of wonder on account of its intrinsic greatness of mind' (καὶ φωνῆς δίχα θαυμάζεται ποτε ψιλὴ καθ' ἑαυτὴν ἢ ἔννοια δι' αὐτὸ τὸ μεγαλόφρον)—is that it makes a kind of elision between the 'thought'

⁶⁰ It is hard to find an entirely satisfactory translation for the *hapax legomenon* ἀδρεπήβολον at 8.1: the term implies concentrated energy, ambition and mastery; cf. Lombardo 2007: 81 n. 70. As a partial parallel, note that Proclus attributes to Plato's *Timaeus* a pervasive ἀδρότης ἐν τοῖς διανοήμασι: *In Tim.* iii 200 Diehl. On a rather different level, cf. the reference of Adamantius *Jud. Physiogn.* i 14, in a physiognomic context, to 'concentrated, elevated thoughts', νοήματα ἀδρά, ὑψηλά.

or 'conception' (*ennoia*) of the poet and of the character himself. In the present instance, this is inescapably paradoxical. Longinus describes Ajax's silence as having a greatness 'more sublime than any words'; yet Ajax's silence only exists, we might have supposed, in the sublime words of Homer (fashioned dramatically into the narrated memories of Odysseus). It is as if the sublimity of the poetry, which is notionally Longinus' concern (though, unusually and revealingly, he gives no quotation from the text at this point), becomes a transparent medium through which we directly apprehend or intuit the sublime silence of the hero. This consideration is deepened by the equally paradoxical interplay between the case of Ajax in Hades and the immediately preceding apophthegm about sublimity as an 'echo' of greatness of mind. How can silence constitute an *echo*, as in some sense it must do if the greatness of Ajax is to disclose itself without speech? Or how can there be an echo of silence, as there must be for the sublime to be captured in Homer's words and transmitted by them to his audience?⁶¹ Only, it seems, in the 'echo chamber' of the mind itself. And it is not silence *per se* which echoes there, but the *thought* of the greatness of mind enacted both by Ajax's refusal to speak and by the Homeric poetry that conceives of that refusal.

But what exactly, we might still wonder, is the sublime 'thought' which Longinus recognizes in these lines of *Odyssey* 11? And where is 'greatness of mind' to be found in what might in principle be regarded as nothing more dignified than a sullen gesture of obdurate hatred? Neither question can be satisfactorily answered with bare reference to the occurrence of Ajax's silence. Practising Longinus' own principle in chapter 7 that sublimity 'leaves behind for the mind's reflection material for renewed contemplation which is more than what is actually said' (341–2 above), we must look for a more profound reverberation within that silence. It does not seem exclusively to be a matter of 'emotion', even though Odysseus' narrative emphasizes Ajax's anger and brooding resentment (over the arms of Achilles) as the reason for his refusal to speak. Nor can the 'thought' contained in the passage be a categorical proposition, e.g. that (Homeric) heroes never abandon their hatreds: as well as stripping Ajax's behaviour of

⁶¹ See 7.3 for a clear indication that sublime writing disposes the mind of the hearer/reader to greatness of mind (*πρὸς μεγαλοφροσύνην*): the greatness is not simply pondered or contemplated but somehow absorbed or internalized, a process which cannot be dissociated from Longinian 'ecstasy'.

its special impact in response to Odysseus' *request* to abandon his anger (*Odyssey* 11.561–2), this would simply be false, as demonstrated above all by the case of the Iliadic Achilles. The sublimity encapsulated in and conveyed by Ajax's silence must have something to do with a notion of heroic greatness, but it must be more 'intuitive' than any single proposition could capture. In that respect, Longinus' own withholding of any explanation is a critically apt concomitant of the dramatic silence itself.

Any further interpretation, therefore, can only be speculative—and, perhaps, an intrusion upon Longinus' response to the creative tautness of the Homeric moment.⁶² My tentative suggestion is that, given everything else we learn from the treatise, what makes Ajax's gesture meet the standards of the Longinian sublime cannot be dissociated from an intuitive idea of *eternity*: the idea, more specifically, of a silence which not only extends beyond death but will never be broken once Ajax's soul has turned away from his former comrade Odysseus.⁶³ The Homeric text admittedly seems to complicate or modify this thought: Odysseus states, retrospectively, that Ajax might even so have spoken to him, if Odysseus' own desire to see the souls of the other dead had not affected him so strongly.⁶⁴ But that statement, which can best be understood as expressive of Odysseus' own feelings, not Ajax's, is ignored by Longinus, who reacts to the hero's silence as an act purely in its own right rather than as recounted by Odysseus. Nor, in keeping with that last point, does Longinus allow for a 'tragic' reading of this moment from the Nekyia, a reading which would find in Ajax's gesture a grievous testimony to irreversible human failure. Instead, the thesis that Ajax's silence has an intrinsic 'greatness of mind/spirit' (τὸ μεγαλόφρον) requires an intuition of eternity to function in this context as a symbolic correlate of the unlimited powers of the human mind, the infinite (extra-cosmic) reach of thought itself, as celebrated in the metaphysics of

⁶² For an interesting reading of (Longinus' reference to) Ajax's silence somewhat differently nuanced from mine, see Lombardo 1989–90; cf. Donadi 2005: 160–1 n. 2.

⁶³ For eternity as an explicit measure or dimension of human greatness, cf. 44.9: the greatness of things which last 'for ever', πρὸς τὸν αἰῶνα (cf. 4.7 for the phrase). Segal (1959) discusses 'the eternal' as a feature of sublimity which marks its resistance to the cultural decadence of particular epochs.

⁶⁴ *Od.* 11.565–7: see Heubeck, *CHO* ii. 110–11, for the view of some scholars that these lines are interpolated; de Jong (2001: 293) reads them as reflecting Odysseus' apologetic or self-exculpating account of the episode.

chapter 35.⁶⁵ To count as sublime, Ajax's silence must echo for eternity—a form of infinity—in a spirit not of mere denial or negativity, as claimed by Odysseus (hence Longinus' suppression of his account of the scene), let alone as a desperate intimation of the tragic (an interpretation hard to resist yet blocked by Longinus' own scheme of values), but of something more like heroically indestructible self-affirmation.

My suggestion, then, is that the compressed treatment of Ajax's appearance in the *Nekyia* at 9.2 implicitly posits the poetic presence of a 'thought' which lacks a fully determinate propositional content, whose locus involves a blurring between the minds of character, poet, and reader/audience (since the thought in question 'echoes' from one to the next), but whose 'intuitive' significance carries with it overtones of the metaphysics of chapter 35. At the same time, the example epitomizes the delicate relationship which can often be detected between 'thought' (*ennoia* etc.) and 'emotion' (*pathos*) in the arguments of the treatise. This relationship is complicated by, among other things, Longinus' striking recognition that there exists 'an indefinitely large number of emotions' (πολλά... καὶ ἀναρίθμητα πᾶσι, 22.1), a view unparalleled, I think, in antiquity and one which suggests a sensibility that is bound to find it hard to draw a strict and consistent dividing line between the categories of thought and emotion.⁶⁶ The description of Ajax's silence as a case of 'thought' (*ennoia*) rather than *pathos* may reflect Longinus' tendency to think of sublime emotion as something that manifests itself impulsively in fervent, passionate forms of expression, whereas Ajax's action, however momentous, is metaphorically as well as literally muted. Yet it is clear that the presence of emotion, whether the enduring anger posited by Odysseus or something more complex, needs to be inferred, indeed intuited, to make sense of Ajax's behaviour. If we recall, once again, the principle that the authentically sublime involves meanings that go beyond 'what is actually said', the case of a sublime silence can only

⁶⁵ I take a notion of 'infinity' to be implicit in the idea of thought exceeding the boundaries of the cosmos at 35.3 (343–4 and n. 35 above), even though neither here nor anywhere else does Longinus use the explicit vocabulary of ἀπειρος *vel sim.* (cf. Heraclitus B45 DK, first epigraph to this chapter).

⁶⁶ At the same time, Longinus' concept of *pathos* can encompass strongly physical sensations: cf. his phrase 'a conjunction of (sc. several) emotions' (παθῶν σύννοδος) for Sappho's depiction of erotic torment that runs through the whole body and soul (10.3).

challenge a reader's or critic's ability to articulate the content of the greatness of mind which Ajax exhibits. But it is clear enough that if, for Longinus, there is a kind of truth to be identified in the passage from *Odyssey* 11, the 'thought' to which it belongs must bring with it a synthesis of intuition (ideas that reverberate beyond the level of the literal), emotion (the open-ended realm of the soul's impulses), and implicit metaphysics (the capacity of the mind to transcend the material and the finite).

Our understanding of this major aspect of Longinus' critical position can be advanced by examining another example which involves the Homeric Ajax, but one which makes direct mention of both emotion and truth. Further on in chapter 9, Longinus adduces as an instance of Homer's imaginative ability to 'enter into [or step inside] the state of mind of heroic greatness' (εἰς τὰ ἡρωϊκὰ μεγέθη συνεμβάλλειν) a passage in *Iliad* 17 which stands at the opposite end of the spectrum of expressiveness from that of implacable silence. This is where Ajax, in tears (a detail omitted by Longinus), implores Zeus, who he realizes is helping the Trojans at this point, to disperse the thick mist covering the battlefield and imperilling the Greeks' attempt to remove the body of Patroclus. The last three lines of Ajax's speech are quoted, with their passionate climax: 'kill us, if you must, at least in the glare of daylight!' (ἐν δὲ φάει καὶ ὀλεσσον).⁶⁷ Longinus comments, 'the emotion is truly that of Ajax' (ἔστιν ὡς ἀληθῶς τὸ πάθος Αἴαντος, 9.10), an emotion he takes to be compounded of anger or indignation (ἀγανακτεῖν) and a determination to pursue noble ends with unflinching courage.

It is worth pausing here to notice the difference between Longinus' use of the Iliadic passage and Edmund Burke's reference to the same text in his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the*

⁶⁷ *Il.* 17.647: the scholia on this passage single it out for special praise (and Σ^A uses the adverb μεγαλοφρόνως, 'with greatness of mind'); see Mazzucchi 1992: 174, Edwards, *IC* v. 125. This probably represents a critical tradition older than Longinus, who will then be following an established judgement here as often elsewhere too: it is intrinsic to his project that he works with mostly familiar, widely admired texts—cf. his 'universal approval' test of sublimity at 7.4 (where 'everyone' requires interpretation and masks an implicit cultural selectivity)—but tries to refine or extend existing perceptions of their qualities. On Longinus' treatment of the passage, cf. Köhnken 2006: 576–8.

Sublime and Beautiful of 1757. Burke cites the same lines (in Greek, without translation), which he probably knew from Longinus' own treatise, to illustrate the association of utter darkness with 'terror' and therefore with the sublime, which for Burke is a partly painful emotion arising from the idea of danger: 'terror', as he puts it, 'is in all cases whatsoever, either more openly or latently, the ruling principle of the sublime'.⁶⁸ I mentioned earlier, in connection with Longinus' anti-tragic sensibility, that he allows some instances of *hupsos* to be linked with feelings of fear, though never with what he regards as the 'low' fear of mere concern for self-preservation.⁶⁹ The case of Ajax in *Iliad* 17 brings this out explicitly: 'he does not pray to Zeus for his life, which would be beneath [literally: too low for, *ταπεινότερον*] the hero . . .; he intends to find a burial worthy of his courage, even if Zeus himself should fight against him'. For Longinus, unlike Burke, the sublime lies not in the battlefield darkness itself but only in the defiantly heroic self-affirmation of Ajax: not, that is, in the mind's susceptibility to ideas of danger but only in its power to nullify them by its own strength of will.

'The emotion is truly that of Ajax.' The phrasing of this comment, though unremarkable in itself, signals what Longinus takes to be an emotional intensity that is true to the heroic expectations of the situation. This means that, despite what may initially appear a huge disparity between the two cases, he applies to this Iliadic example the same criterion of emotional authenticity as he employs for Sappho's poetry at 10.1, where he commends the acumen with which she selects erotic symptoms 'from the truth itself' (345 above). The ostensible disparity between the two poetic contexts is reduced by the fact that Longinus discerns an almost heroic dimension to the erotic obsession expressed by Sappho. He is impressed, as I noted earlier, by her concentration on 'the extremes' or most acute symptoms (*τὰ ἄκρα*: he uses the term twice, 10.1, 3, and refers back to it again at 11.3) of erotic pathology, symptoms 'stretched almost to

⁶⁸ The last quotation is from *Philosophical Enquiry*, ii. 2, McLoughlin and Boulton 1997: 230–1; the citation of Hom. *Il.* 17.645–7 is at *Enquiry*, iv. 14, McLoughlin and Boulton 1997: 294–5. For an earlier 18th-cent. attempt to make 'terror' central to the sublime, see the extract from John Dennis in Ashfield and de Bolla 1996: 35–9, a useful anthology which partly modifies (see the editors' introduction, 1–16) the perspective of Monk (1935).

⁶⁹ See 353 with n. 55 above.

breaking point' (ὑπερτεταμένα).⁷⁰ The extremes in question, with Sappho's suffering lover as with Homer's raging hero, display the mind's own pulsating energies seeking suitable expression for themselves, though in both cases doing so in ways that are distinctive precisely because of the circumstances which *thwart* them. Even so, there remains a subtle difference between the idea of emotional 'truth' in the two cases. Where Sappho's depiction of erotic torment is concerned, Longinus seems to suppose that for all the (concealed) artistry of selection and compression that goes into her tightly bound lyric, there is a kind of emotional realism that sustains the sublimity of what she achieves. The psychological material she works with is the kind of thing all lovers experience (10.3) and can therefore be recognized by her hearers/readers as faithful to what erotic torment in general is like. But this can hardly be quite so with Ajax. How can anyone but a hero of Iliadic proportions recognize what emotions are 'true' or authentic for someone pleading with Zeus himself in the middle of a battlefield shrouded in darkness? The underlying Longinian answer to this question brings us back round to the synthesis of intuitive, emotional, and metaphysical truth for which I am arguing.

We (non-heroes) can recognize Ajax's emotion as 'truly' heroic because Homer himself, supremely capable of imaginatively entering the minds of heroes (but also a hero of the spirit in his own right),⁷¹ has made it so compellingly real. And Homer's creative ability to do this, as well as the capacity of his audience or readers intuitively to

⁷⁰ 'Outstanding details', Russell 1972: 472 (cf. 'vital details', *ibid.* 474, at *Subl.* 11.3), does not capture the force of Longinus' τὰ ἄκρα (cf. 33.2, where the same term denotes the dangerous extremes at which great, sublime natures aim). The verb ὑπερτείνεισθαι, to be stretched or strained to/beyond the limit, is also used of Demosthenes' vehemently emotional sublimity at 12.5; but there is a delicately gauged art to such emotional tension/tautness: when the verb occurs once more at 38.1, it describes hyperbole so overdone that it simply falls flat.

⁷¹ The greatest writers are themselves 'heroic' for Longinus: see esp. 14.2 ('such great heroes', τηλικούτοις ἥρωσι), 15.5 (Aeschylus boldly undertaking 'the most heroic imaginings', φαντασίαις ἐπιτολμώντος ἡρωϊκωτάταις), 35.2 ('demigods', ἰσόθεοι), 36.2 ('heroes'); there is always *danger* (n. 16 above) in sublimity (e.g. 33.2). There is a partial Homeric precedent in the description of the blind bard Demodocus as 'hero' (ἥρωας) at *Od.* 8.483; but scholars both ancient and modern have struggled to cope with this special appellation; cf. Hainsworth, *CHO* i. 378. Note also how at *Subl.* 9.11 Longinus applies to Homer himself, qua inspired creator, the simile which at *Il.* 15.605–7 describes Hector's furious advance towards the Greek ships: the poet's own writing becomes a heroic process in its expansion of the powers of mind and imagination.

grasp and emotionally to participate in the moments of heroism he enacts, is a demonstration of the transcendent scope of thought and feeling which belongs, for Longinus, to the very nature of mind. The truth of Ajax's sublimity is therefore conveyed and transmitted by the mind's own 'echoes', linking poet to hero, reader to poet, and reader to hero. At every stage in this chain—in Ajax's audacious refusal to be cowed even by the sky-god himself; in Homer's ability to inhabit through language the consciousness of a hero *in extremis* on the battlefield; and in the capacity of readers to feel Ajax's emotions reverberating in themselves—there is an element of Longinian transcendence, a reaching by the mind beyond the finitude of material existence. Because the powers of mind constitute the essence and purpose of humanity (their use is what nature has brought us into the 'theatre of the cosmos' *for*, in the terms of chapter 35), Longinus is committed to believing that the intuitive, emotional, and implicitly metaphysical workings of sublime language—or even, in the limiting case, of sublime silence—are indeed a form of truth, a way of making contact with the most permanent aspects of reality. For this reason, the thematic and circumstantial differences between the true-to-life erotic emotions of Sappho and the extreme heroic courage expressed by Ajax in *Iliad* 17 cannot be all-important for Longinus. It is not their respective positions on a scale of realism which matter most to him but the sublimity they share in virtue of communicating intense states of emotion and thereby releasing the mind's potential for that heightened fulfilment (the sense of having 'given birth to what it has heard') and that grasp of a resonant 'surplus of meaning' of which chapter 7 spoke.⁷² The communication of *pathos* by language was, of course, a commonplace principle of ancient rhetoric, but Longinus makes of it something distinctive and special. In chapter 39, in a passage of musical imagery which I discussed earlier, he speaks of this communication as a process of emotional 'participation' or 'communion', using the quasi-philosophical term *metousia* (μετουσία, 39.3) in a way unparalleled, as far as I am aware, in the rest of ancient rhetorical theory.⁷³ The communication of the sublime is a

⁷² See 341–2 above.

⁷³ The same noun is used by Agathon at Ar. *Thesm.* 152 to denote the creative poet's imaginative participation in the mentality of his characters, a different point from Longinus' at 39.3.

'communion' of minds in which truth (contact with the real) and ecstasy (moments of transformative consciousness) meet.

I would like to consider one final Longinian proof text in support of my thesis that the 'truth' of the sublime involves a convergence of intuitive, emotional, and metaphysical factors. This is an example which takes us to the heart of the one of the work's most detailed pieces of criticism, the discussion of Demosthenes' Marathon oath (the oath he swears by the Athenians who fought the battle of Marathon and other engagements against the Persians) in chapter 16. Longinus picks out the oath from a section of Demosthenes' speech *On the Crown* which he describes as a passage of political *apodeixis* (16.2, twice; cf. 351 above), i.e. formal argument or discursive reasoning, delivered in defence of the orator's political career. Although Longinus goes on to say that Demosthenes 'transforms' or 'converts' (μεθιστάναι) the argument into a moment of sublime emotion, he does not thereby suggest that the passage ceases to be an exercise in *apodeixis*: he repeats this term a third time in his summing-up of the oath's multiple functions (16.3). This means that the moment of sublimity created by Demosthenes is fully embedded in its rhetorical context and grows out of the orator's immediate persuasive purpose, namely to convince the Athenians that they were not wrong to fight against Philip at Chaeronea, even though they had been heavily defeated by him.

But Longinus takes the sublimity of the added oath ('It cannot be that you were wrong [to face such danger for the sake of everyone's freedom and salvation]—I swear it by those who faced such danger at Marathon!⁷⁴) to transform Demosthenes' point by conveying, yet without spelling out propositionally, two further thoughts: one, that in attempting to stand up to Philip the Athenians acted in the same spirit as their ancestors during the Persian wars; secondly, that those ancestors themselves, as suitable subjects of an oath, should be regarded as godlike or quasi-divine (the oath 'deifies' and 'immortalizes' them, as Longinus puts it: ἀποθεώσας, 16.2; ἀπαθανατίσας, 16.3). At the same time, these ideas, which in their expressive implicitness illustrate so well what I have called the 'intuitive' character of much that counts as 'thought' for Longinus, are associated with the pressure of a double emotion, *pathos*: first, the contemporary Athenians' pride

⁷⁴ Dem. 18.208: the words in square brackets are omitted from Longinus' quotation.

(here, under the influence of Demosthenes' own vocabulary, called *φρόνημα* by Longinus, a word which itself denotes a mixture of cognition and feeling⁷⁵) at being compared to such famous, glorious ancestors; secondly, the consolation (a kind of 'medicine' or 'antidote' for the mind, in Longinus's metaphor⁷⁶) which Demosthenes offers his hearers by allowing them to feel that even a defeat in battle cannot nullify the heroism of those who had such noble reasons for fighting. In his reading of the oath, therefore, Longinus provides a prominent instance not only of his axiom that *hupsos* reaches 'beyond persuasion' to ecstasy, but also of the interdependence, indeed fusion, of thought and emotion that ideally characterizes the sublime. One cannot grasp the thought conveyed by the Marathon oath without recognizing the emotions evoked by, and attaching to, it; and one cannot identify those emotions without grasping the ideas (of history, identity, and heroism) on which they rest.

It needs underlining, however, that Longinus' interpretation of Demosthenes' oath does not ascribe to it anything like a specifically propositional content or a concretely historical truth. Whatever the religious details of the Athenians' funerary treatment of the war-dead of Marathon or other battles of the Persian wars, Longinus no more takes them to have been literally deified than he believes in gods (as chapter 9 shows: 346–7 above) who literally fought one another on the plain of Troy.⁷⁷ If, moreover, there is a sense in which it is true that Demosthenes' contemporaries have manifested the same heroic spirit as their ancestors, that is not a truth whose full force can be impartially registered by an observer: it can be apprehended only from *within* the sublimely charged perspective revealed by the

⁷⁵ Demosthenes' own use of both *φρόνημα* and *φρονεῖν* at 18.206 has influenced Longinus here. Cf. the conjunction of the two words, together with *φρονηματίας*, at *Subl.* 9.3, where the cluster bears out the blend of semantic content and elevated spirit/emotion in Longinus' general employment of *φρον-* terms, not least in *μεγαλοφροσύνη* itself.

⁷⁶ *ἀλεξιφάρμακον*, *Subl.* 16.2. Cf., though with a rather different sense, 32.4, where strong emotion and the sublime act as 'antidotes', in the sense of mitigating forces, against an excess of figures of speech. See von Staden 2000: 372–4. The term *ἀλεξιφάρμακον* occurs as a metaphor for the power of words at *Pl. Leg.* 12.957d: it is related to the larger repertoire of imagery (from magic, drugs, etc.) noted at 332, 336 above.

⁷⁷ There is some *post*-Classical evidence for the Marathon war-dead receiving hero cult: see Parker 1996: 137 for further information. But such religious particulars are irrelevant to Longinus' view of the quasi-deification achieved through the power of Demosthenes' oath.

orator's words. The kind of truth which, on Longinus' reading, underpins the Marathon oath is both 'intuitive', by virtue of the implicit idea it conveys of the ancestors as a divine paradigm of excellence, and 'emotional', by virtue of the passionate feeling of affinity between past and present which Demosthenes makes available to his Athenian audience—and to anyone else in whose mind the orator's sublimity finds an authentic 'echo'.

But I think that in addition to these interlocking elements of intuition and emotion we can trace a layer of 'metaphysical' truth as well in this passage. This is precisely because Longinus' interpretation of the oath is concerned with the thought of human lives attaining to the plane not only of the heroic (already a touchstone of the sublime) but also of the divine. In view of the importance of chapter 35 of the treatise for the concept of metaphysical truth I have been employing here, it is highly *à propos* to recall that in that later context the greatest exponents of the sublime (including Demosthenes) are themselves called 'godlike' or 'demigods' (*isotheoi*), and the sublime potential of human nature is there defined partly in terms of an irresistible passion (*erôs*) for that which is 'more divine' (*daimoniôtéron*) than us. Because the sublime itself, we can now say, involves a movement towards divinization (auto-divinization, indeed, on the part of the writer), Demosthenes' intuitive deification of the Athenian fighters at Marathon is not just powerfully eloquent in relation to its own historical situation. It exemplifies the sense in which the Longinian sublime *per se* is a reaching or aspiration of the human towards the conditions of the divine, an aspiration transmitted from one mind to another through the transfigurative thought and enthralling emotion of creative language.

If we ask, in conclusion, what for Longinus are the essential 'conditions of the divine', there is no doctrinally simple answer to be found. For all its general air of Platonico-Stoic faith in the goodness, greatness, and divinity of the world-order, we cannot pinpoint in *On the Sublime* any specific tenets about god(s), the soul's destiny, or the organization of the cosmos.⁷⁸ The work's embrace of an ostensibly religious vocabulary of 'the divine', including the 'godlike' status of the finest poets and prose-writers, leaves an impression of hovering in a sort of twilight zone between literalism and metaphor. The process

⁷⁸ I differ here from e.g. Most 2007: 46, who ascribes to Longinus a full-blown (quasi-Stoic) belief in divine providence.

by which the sublime raises those writers 'above the whole domain of the mortal' (παντός . . . ἐπάνω τοῦ θνητοῦ) and 'close to the greatness of mind of (a) god' (ἐγγύς . . . μεγαλοφροσύνης θεοῦ, 36.1) is one which takes place nowhere other than in the *logos* (itself both language and thought) of their words. Whatever beliefs we might choose to project onto the author of the treatise, his only securely declared commitments are all clustered around the impact of certain kinds of language on the mind. I have argued that to become attuned to what that impact signifies for Longinus, we need to follow in his criticism a dialectic between the transformative moments of consciousness which he thinks of in 'ecstatic' terms and, on the other hand, the unsystematic but persistent indications that sublimity can be a vehicle of certain kinds of truth: a truth not of particular propositions, nor of complex structures of meaning conveyed by entire works, but of flashes of intuitive-cum-emotional insight which may be embodied in many kinds of context (descriptive, narrative, discursive, lyric, etc.) yet always reflect, one way or another, the 'metaphysics of mind' adumbrated in chapter 35 of the treatise. That metaphysics itself, however, cannot be codified or formalized into a set of propositions; like so much of what Longinus admires in the texts he adduces, it is something more like an inspiring 'vision' or expressively charged impulse. The conception of metaphysical truth I have attributed to Longinus does not require conscious acceptance of a body of philosophical or religious principles. What it requires is the actualization of metaphysics in the mind's awareness of its own transfigurative potential. The human soul itself—in its capacity to reach beyond the material, beyond the present, and beyond its mundane ego—is the true locus of Longinian sublimity. The sublime is the greatness of the cosmos, and even of an infinity 'beyond the cosmos', *internalized* in the spaces of the mind.⁷⁹ And that is the place where ecstasy and truth can meet.

⁷⁹ I wrote this sentence before encountering (or perhaps re-encountering) its mirror image in Emerson's transcendentalism: 'The Universe is the externization [*sic*] of the soul': Atkinson 1940: 325, from 'The Poet' (1844). Cf. also Bloom 1986: 3–4, 'Longinus knows . . . that the true poem is the reader's mind', a formulation which echoes the Kantian sublime (n. 32 above). But Bloom, the most 'Longinian' of current anglophone critics (criticism 'emerges fully as an art' with Longinus: Bloom 1986: 2; cf. Ch. 3 n. 3), diverges from Longinus in claiming that 'there is after all no truth of the poem apart from the reading of it': in the terms of my analysis, this collapses truth into ecstasy; it is also hard to reconcile with *Subl.* 7.3 (cf. 340–1, 357 n. 61 above).

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